

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

No. 13.—THIRD SERIES. SATURDAY, MARCH 30, 1889.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

LOUIS DRAYCOTT.

BY MRS. R. S. DE COURCY LAFFAN.

Author of "Geoffrey Stirling," etc. etc.

CHAPTER V. THE BITTERNESS OF DEATH.

FROM the heavy morning sleep that follows upon a wakeful night I was disturbed by a hurried knocking at my door. Scarcely had I time to rouse myself and listen, when Kezia, with a candle in her hand, and an expression of great trouble on her face, was by my bedside shaking me softly by the shoulder.

"Miss Dacie; they've come from Master Randall's. He wants you as quick as possible. His wife's took bad—and he's clean daft-like."

The morning was dark and chill; the grey dawn, creeping up over a dull, leaden sky, showed dark streets and dripping leaves.

"Don't say anything to Miss Charlotte yet," I said to Kezia as I went downstairs; "all may yet be well."

"I put the tea-kettle atop of a fire-lighter or two afore I come up to you, Miss Dacie, and now there's a cup of tea ready just to warm you afore you face things; try to sup it a bit, there's a dear."

I could not hurt the faithful creature by refusing, and proceeded to scald myself with sips of hot tea while she stood by, looking furtively at me in a curious fashion, and more than once opening her mouth as if to speak, and then closing it with a snap.

Just as I was starting down the first step she plucked at my gown.

"Miss Dacie," she said, "the girl said took mortal bad! That's what she said—mortal bad. And then, orf she was, she couldna bide for ye. She was that hasted-

like, and she'd a long kind of a face on her as she said them words—'Mortal bad.' Heaven save us, Miss Dacie, but I wish that there picter had never ha' fell!"

Then Kezia shut me out on the top step, leaving me to "face things" with what courage I could muster.

It was not much; for, as I hurried through the streets, where now the new day's life was but beginning to stir, words which I had heard in what seemed a happy time set far back in the past, kept ringing in my ears.

"There has never been anything so good in my life before; never anything so good—never anything so good—"

When I reached the house the door seemed to open of itself, and there stood my brother Randall.

At least, something in his likeness; and yet a Randall that I had never seen before; a hopeless, haggard-eyed man, with no smile of greeting for me, no shining in the eyes that were like mother's.

He just took me by the hand as he used to do when he was a boy, and I his ever-so-much elder sister, and thus holding me, without one spoken word, he led me to the room where Lucille lay.

A white, still face, like the face of a marble statue; a cloud of bright brown hair thrown back across the pillow; pale hands extended in extremity of weakness—was this Lucille?

As I bent over her she stirred, called back from that misty borderland, that lies between life and death, by the sense of a fresh presence.

The eyes that never yet had given me an ungentle look unclosed; the lips that were livid, as though death had kissed and chilled them, quivered, and then smiled upon me.

I screwed up my face, and tried to keep back the tears that rose and blinded me. I untied my bonnet, and flung it down anywhere. I wanted to be brave and helpful; we all—that is all of us who are worth anything—want to be these things, and more, at such a moment; but those of us who have gone through the ordeal know how hard it is, and how the tears will blind, and the sobs will choke us, just when we want to see most clearly, and speak most calmly.

"Nay, Dacie; do not cry so, dear," said Lucille, and put up her hand to touch my poor, drawn face. "I am so glad you are come. I wanted to see you. Randall said he would send for you. You will be good to Randall—won't you, dear?"

But even as I promised, even as I held back the sobs to speak, something told me that if Lucille left him, neither I nor any one could be "good" to Randall any more.

Then I watched the stillness and silence into which Lucille had once more fallen, while the little timepiece on the mantel-shelf seemed to fall into regular cadence, and say with its soft beating: "Nev—er—any—thing—so—good. Nev—er—any—thing—so—good."

Presently Randall, having, as I could see, by a supreme effort, gained the possibility of calmness, came close to my side, and bent over his dying wife—yes, dying! It is only when you are dying, only when there is nothing to do but to wait for the end, that doctors leave you alone.

I had met one, grave and sympathetic, leaving the house as I came up to it. I caught a glimpse now and again of another, seated by the fire in an inner room. But these things only made a surface-deep and cursory impression on my mind. My deeper thoughts stood alone with Lucille and her husband—we three, isolated from all the rest of the world.

As Randall's breath touched her cheek, Lucille stirred. Once more her eyes opened, but they were misty now—lacking the clearness of recognition.

Past and present mingled in her thoughts, blurring each other's outlines, melting the one into the other.

"Call my baby 'Margaret,'" she said; "it was mother's name."

I started.

There was a baby, then. The little maid of whom I had dreamed so often had really come among us, but at what a cost!

I heard Randall say, "Yes, dear;" I saw him raise the soft white hand that was

lying so lifeless and inert, and press his lips upon it—his lips, that showed white under his moustache; while his eyes—

Oh! I had seen mother's look like that when she told us that she should never live to see her boy again! It was a craving, hungry look, full of a passionate yearning doomed to linger there, and die unsatisfied!

With a little, pitiful moan, Lucille turned her head uneasily upon the pillow, looking up at Randall with misty, troubled eyes.

"It was so hard, so hard, to live through—day by day, and year by year. Sometimes I could hardly bear it; I was bad and fretful under it. I could not have lived through it at all, if it hadn't been for the boys. Dumphie came straight from Heaven, I think, to comfort me."

Down went my humbled head upon the bed-clothes. All my past dislike to the four boys, Dumphie especially, rose up and judged me.

"Dumphie was always the same—so gentle and so loving. He used to pat my face when he saw the tears upon my cheek. Once some one struck him for doing it. He only cuddled up to me, and said: 'I don't mind, Muddie—I don't mind one bit.' But I felt him shake as he held me. Oh, my poor boy!" Here her voice broke into a cry, the cruel past was rising up before her like some dreadful vision. "Alison, Alison! do what you like to me, but not the boys—not the boys——"

In a moment Randall had her in his arms; was bending over her, calling her by every fond, endearing name, and striving to chase away the shadows of the past by the might of the strong, present love.

And he prevailed. She looked up at him with quiet, seeing eyes; she looked from him to me and back again.

"Randall," she said, "am I dying?"

For all answer came a cry that welled up right from his bursting heart.

"My darling—— Oh, my darling!"

For a moment—silence; while the clock ticked on, telling to my straining ears the same sad burden as before:

"Nev—er—any—thing—so—good—nev—er—any—thing—so—good——"

And now the goodness, and the sweetness, and the beauty that had come into my brother's life was fading out of it—passing just a little further away with every tick of the little clock.

"Heaven has been very good to me, dear," said Lucille, and nestled closer to her husband's breast.

"Dacie," she went on, "you will be very good to all of them, I know; and Dumphie will help you, he is not like other children—not like the rest. When they came to see me just now he did not cry like the others; he touched my face in the old, loving way; he looked at me as if he wanted to know what he could do—he was always like that—always. Tell him to love his little sister, and be good to her; tell him I said so."

As the last word of this loving message left her white lips, a change came over Lucille.

She gazed long and earnestly at Randall; he at her. Her eyes had a strange, fixed light, a wonderful intensity of consciousness.

The nurse had come noiselessly to the bedside several times; the doctor had stolen quietly across the room and looked at, and touched the patient, who was fast slipping through his fingers. Now they came no more. There was nothing more for any one to do.

And Lucille lay with the wonderful death-light in her eyes, and Randall, watching her, seemed to have gone with her to some far-off place apart, to which they two, he and she, and none other, could attain.

Then, in a moment, though the smile lingered on her lips, the light had died out of her eyes, and—still looking on him she loved—saw him no more.

I did want to comfort my brother; I did try to speak those words of sublime consolation that Heaven itself has given us for such supreme moments. But I could not, for the sobs rose up and choked me.

She, so good, so sweet, so tender, to be lying there white, and still, and dead; never to lift her dear hand to mine; never to speak in that gentle voice, never to laugh in the old, merry fashion at the little jests we both loved; never to meet me, never to greet me.

I declare I almost forgot my brother Randall in those first few moments of bitterness.

Not for long, though; and, I think, neither he nor his ever again.

When death steps in, we cease to measure time. For the moment, we live and move in some world where time is not. The loved one has left us; but was it this morning, or yesterday—or has this awful silence lasted so long that we cannot count its duration?

I cannot say when it was that I stole across the landing and up the passage leading to the pleasant, sunny room that was called the nursery. It had suddenly been borne in upon me that I had a mission to take up, a task to perform, that even now I could redeem my promise to Lucille, that I would step in and spare Randall—something.

I would tell—the boys.

Resolutely putting Dumphie out of my mind as a distinct figure, merging him in the rest, and so striving to gain courage—if such weakness as mine can be called by such a name—I turned the handle, and opened the door.

The scene that met my eyes might well have upset a more assured composure.

There, opposite the fire, stood a cradle, begirt with the soft lace curtains at which I so well remembered to have seen Lucille's active fingers stitching. Round about were seated—or rather squatted—the four boys.

Dumphie on a stool at the head of the cradle, Glennie at the foot, Stephen and John holding on to one another in order to meet this new and stupendous crisis in their lives in a fitting and becoming manner, at the side farthest from the fire.

Could such a picture ever be forgotten—the picture of the four boys regarding their sleeping treasure—wondering, awed, tremulously happy in the possession of this marvellous new gift?

A moment I hesitated, wavered, almost felt ready to go back whence I had come, my tale of woe untold.

But Glennie was too prompt for me. He had me by the gown in a trice; he drew me close to the casket that held such treasure-trove in the twinkling of an eye. He took upon himself the office of master of the ceremonies.

"There is an ikkle baby come," he said. "It has an ikkle face and two ikkle hands; it sleeps all the time; it is quite perzackly." Then he spread out his chubby paw over the head of the cradle. "It is our very own," he said, solemnly; and Stephen and John nodded their heads as one boy, and echoed "our very own."

I looked through the mist of falling lace, and so caught my first glimpse of baby Margaret—the Mazie who was to give me such infinite joy, to cost me such anguish of tears, to yield me such precious comfort in the time to come.

All this while Dumphie was silent.

Dumphie had graver thoughts. His silence seemed a thing that I must fling out my hands to and push from me—a thing I dreaded beyond any words that could have been.

Oh, Dumphie, Dumphie! why do you look at me with grave, wide eyes, full of tender questionings?

Are not my knees shaking under me? Is not my heart beating so low and heavily in my wretched little body that all the world seems going round with me? Why need you make things harder for me than they are already? What can I say to you, you loving, faithful soul? What can I do to soften the pain of the cruel, bitter truth?

For a while, Dumphie and I looked at each other in silence, while the three others came closer and peered through the curtain of the cradle timidly, touching a tiny fist that shows pink through the white.

At last Dumphie spoke.

"Aunt Dacie—can I go to—my mother?"

There was a sob in Dumphie's throat before those two last words. The child feared he knew not what. He scented something wrong, though he could not put a name to what he dreaded.

Well, well—if any one had told me, in the bygone days, that ever I should cuddle up that goblin-faced boy, and cosset him as though he were a new-born babe, I should not have believed them—that is all.

But I did. I sat down and hauled him up into my lap. He was ever so many sizes too big for such a process. My tears fell down upon his wondering face, like rain, as I told him—Heaven help me! I know not how—that he could not go to his mother, because there was no mother to go to any more.

Events never come in single file. They prefer to crowd around, tumbling over one another's heels and tripping one another up.

They so jostled me, happening in such rapid succession, and generally upsetting me, that I, Dacie Birt, at this juncture of my life, grew dazed and bewildered, and passed at last into that frame of mind and condition of body in which feeling is numb and astonishment impossible.

Hugging Dumphie wildly, trying to stifle his cries against the bodice of my plaid dress; holding him hard and fast as though in fear lest the great sobs should tear him asunder before my eyes; conscious

of Stephen, and John, and Glennie swarming about Dumphie's legs and mine, in such a state of terror and excitement that they seemed not three boys, but thirty; being in fear unspeakable that the nursery door should open and my brother Randall come upon a scene of such confusion and grief, I must have been deaf to the sound of a cab driving wildly and stopping with a jerk.

I certainly heard nothing that betokened an arrival, until a low tap at the door made me start and look round, and to us entered—my sister Charlotte.

I have said, in my then condition, astonishment was impossible. I could only look at this unexpected apparition in a dazed and feeble manner, holding on harder than ever to Dumphie, and finding no word to say even when Charlotte sat quietly down and drew little Glennie to her arms.

Not so Kezia, who had followed her mistress into the room. Kezia, in a frightfully patchy toilette, consisting of her large wrapper apron, kitchen cap, and best Sunday bonnet; Kezia, wringing her hands and swaying her lank body backwards and forwards in an agony of consternation; Kezia, voluble in declamation, but, in obedience to an imperative sign from Sister Charlotte, lowering her voice to that husky, creepy-crawley whisper supposed to be suitable to the house of mourning:

"Which it's all the fault of the extra girl, Miss Dacie, if I must never speak another word alive. Up she come, and right foremost Miss Charlotte out she brings it. Says she: 'That sweetest lady's gone right off to her heavenly home;' and Miss Charlotte gives a screech and jumps right up, and 'Kezia,' says she, 'get me my bonnet and my paisley shawl, and send the extry girl for a cab!' You might have knocked me down with a feather, Miss Dacie—you might have knocked me down wi' nothink at all, and I can't say no more than that. And she not out of the house but once last summer, and that in Mr. Peterson's best bath-chair, at two-and-six the hour and sixpence for the boy as pushes. I'm all of a shake and all of a tremble; and it's two funerals instead of one we'll be havin', and all through the upstart ways of that extry girl takin' so much upon herself as no one axed her."

"It is no one's fault, Sister Dacie," said Charlotte, fondling poor wee Glennie as he stood nestling against her shoulder, "no one's fault but mine."

Her dark eyes were swimming in tears; her pale face wore a faint and unaccustomed flush. She looked almost like the Charlotte of old; the girl who had cherished such high hopes, only to see them die, and to lay them in a tomb that knew no resurrection with her own trembling hands.

"All the fault has been mine, dear. The fault of the years that lie behind. I have been of no good in the world; no help to any one, only a wearisomeness and a burden—to you, and to Kezia."

"La, mum!" broke in Kezia at this point, "don't be bringin' in me—don't make no account of me. You're welcome to all I've done, and twenty times as much; and oh! Miss Dacie, that's the way she's bin a-carryin' on all the blessed way. 'I've bin no good,' says she; 'I've giv' in,' says she, 'and never fought agen nothin', in my selfish sorrow I've forgot as others in the world have sorrows too; I've never tried to comfort no one. I've bin a wicked woman,' says she. And I ask you, Miss Dacie, what was poor old Kezia's feelin's, a-hearin' of one of her precious ladies callin' hersel like that?"

"It was true, Kezia, it was true—all that I said, and more—true a thousand times over. The voice of these motherless ones; the thought of my brother's sorrowing heart; the thought of this house of death and mourning; these things drew me like cords, and that is why I am here."

Sister Charlotte spoke with an indescribable dignity, though the tears were raining down her face. Dumphie had hushed his sobs to look at her; Stephen and John had drawn near to her, open-eyed; Glennie was blubbering unrestrainedly upon the paisley shawl; and I was beating my brain for some sensible and soothing utterance, that should quiet everybody, when the door opened, and my brother Randall came into our midst.

He expressed no surprise at the sight of Charlotte among the rest of us. I do not think he felt any. Some impulse had prompted him to seek Lucille's children, perchance to comfort them, though all comfort was so very far from his own heart. He hardly looked as though he saw anything consciously.

I started to my feet, and moved to Sister Charlotte's side. I feared for her, lest the strength born of sudden and violent excitement should fail her.

As for Kezia, she dropped into a chair as if she were shot, and flung her apron over her head, Sunday bonnet and all.

It was left for Dumphie to speak for every one. He rushed to Randall's side, caught him round the legs, and cried out sobbing:

"Papa Birt! Papa Birt! We will be very good to you now mother is gone away!"

END OF BOOK ONE.

THE "ROUND TABLE" IN COUNTY CLARE.

I DOUBT if my reader has ever been in the barony of Burren, in the county of Clare. It is the country of which Cromwell said:

"There isn't a tree big enough to hang a man on, nor water enough to drown him, nor earth enough to bury him in."

Bog, of course; where in Ireland is there not, save in parts of Armagh and County Down? Bog covered, as usual, with sweet-gale, and bog-myrtle, and sedge, and here and there patches, red as blood, thickly set with the insect-catching sundew. Stony glens, with alder-fringed streams, and occasional mud patches, out of which shoots up the royal fern. But the distinctive feature of the district is the bare, flat, limestone uplands, strangely scored with parallel marks, as if, while the rock was still soft, a giant plough had been drawn over it. These shallow furrows throw up the richest, sweetest grass in all Ireland, along with yarrow, and abundance of very small clover, and bird's-foot trefoil. To this is due the excellence of the Clare sheep, famous in the days when the Irishman could say, as was said of the Scot before the Methven treaty:

Old was his mutton, and his claret good.

A weird-looking country. Nowhere, not even in some Cornish "rocky valley," have I felt so fully what is meant by "the bones of the land"—the big giant; there are his ribs, multitudinous, whether it was ice or mere water power that stripped him of flesh and sinews.

Oh, the irony of Nature! Nearly three-fifths of Ireland is carboniferous limestone; but where is the coal? That, and its associated shales, have mostly been stripped off, and only the "calp" left.

Ireland, when the lands were a-making, was, perhaps, a buffer to England—bore the brunt of those primal storms which shaped our part of the world and fixed the nation's destiny.

I had been walking through this barony

of Burren. One does not walk half enough in Ireland; the "shoneen" (sham gentleman) looks down on the practice, and so a walking tourist is, in many parts, scarcely understood. But were I young again, I would do little else. The car is delightful, and, if you sit on the box, you see both sides; but there's nothing like walking for keeping in touch with people such as the Clare peasantry were in my young days. I had gone to Burren to see the prehistoric remains, meaning to get round that way to Connemara, while my children were enjoying themselves on the sands at Kilkee. I had seen Lisdoonvarna with its sulphur springs, now a thriving watering-place, then as small as Llandudno was when I first knew it; and then I had got on to the cliffs by the Hag's Head, and had looked at the poor thin coal seams and the remains of old workings, and had decided not to stop at Liscanor, but to push on to the next village. My aim was Ballyvaughan or Galway Bay, where I heard there was often a "hooker" (coasting vessel) that would put me across. I did go across, not in a "hooker"—that would have cost two days' delay—but in the "corragh" (coracle, skin-boat) of two Isle of Arran fishermen, who were bound for Galway; it was a fitting end to the expedition. But I am anticipating. Night began to fall; I had lingered too long about the cliffs, and that eerie feeling came over me which makes it pain, yet pleasure, to be alone. After a long Irish mile, I saw the light from a cabin window, and I was soon knocking and walking in, with "God save all here" to a rather numerous company gathered round the fire.

"Save yourself kindly, sir; ye're welcome," said the master, rising.

And soon, like the rest, I was eating stirabout with plenty of good milk.

No one asked me why I had come. If I chose to tell them, well and good; but politeness silenced their curiosity. So to begin a conversation I mentioned a "cromlech"—as I foolishly called it—that I had seen on the road.

"Cromlech, sir, you'll excuse me," interrupted a bright young fellow—the schoolmaster, of course. "Cromlech is a circle of stones. But what you've been describing is a 'dolmen,' or 'kistvaen' they call it in Brittany. And as for these things being prehistoric, no such thing. The great architect, Mr. Fergusson, has shown that Stonehenge itself was built since the Romans went."

How did this Clare peasant know all

that? He had read a review of Fergusson's book in the "Nation."

"I get it every week," he said, with just pride—for the "Nation" was then the most cultured paper in Ireland.

But, while I was telling him that Mr. Fergusson's was not the last word on the big stones controversy, we were interrupted by the shrill voice of a little old man, such a man as was once very common, but is now, alas, very rare in Ireland—the "story teller," who, on occasion, could turn out a copy of verses after "the Groves of Blarney" pattern, and who had all the legendary lore of the district at his fingers' ends.

"Hold your tongue for a 'omadhaun' now, Barney. You South Munster men think you've got the world's learning; but they don't teach everything at Cork College. 'Dolmens' and Romans, indeed! Hear now, Mike Greean"—to our host—"your mother there, long life to her, she has the native Irish, pure, as we speak it in Clare, and as it's spoken nowhere else, every bit as well as myself; and she knows that his 'dolmens,' or whatever else he'll call them, are just the beds of Diarmuid and Grainne" ("labha Yarmuith a's Grainne")—he slid out the words just as my Cornish cousins slide out the sweet names of cove, and bay, and hamlet in West Penwith.

I pricked up my ears. Of course, I had read J. F. Campbell's "West Highland Tales"—if you have not, reader, do get them somehow; and if you have any Celtic blood in your veins you'll delight in them more than you ever did in "the tale of Troy divine." Here was a chance. Could I pick up a "sgeulach" (story), a variant on those collected by Campbell?

"Why, that's Diarmuid of the beauty spot," said I.

"Of course; and who else would it be? Him that Grainne saw at the ball-play, as she looked out from her 'grianan'—that's her sunny chamber. She had her own room that way for cheerfulness. Grian is the sun. Yes, you may blush. It's your own name, Mike, and your father's before you, and his father's, and so on. And never a one of you was seen that hadn't a bright, sunny face, the sight of which would be good for sore eyes. Well, and as she watched the play, Diarmuid's mantle slipped off his shoulder, and her eyes fell on the beauty-spot; and from that time she must be his—there was no escaping it. But she was betrothed to Fionn, the old chief of the Feine, after whom these Fenian chaps have named themselves; and Diarmuid was

loyal, and would not go against his chief. So she laid 'gessa' or spells upon him, if he didn't do her bidding*—and in those days no man could stand a woman's spells; it's mighty few can do it now, but then they'd more power, for the world was younger. Saint Patrick himself, in his hymn that he made one night when he was wandering in the dark—as your honour might have been, if you hadn't seen Mister Greean's light—says: 'Christ is my druid, who'll keep me from the spells of Smiths'—cunning fellows they were in the heathen days—'and of women, too.' That's why Diarmuid went off with her out of Tara; and some say they were married, and some say he would not marry without Fionn's leave. But, married or not, where they rested he built up one of these stone chambers for shelter for her. And as Fionn was close upon them in the pursuit, that's why there are never two of these together; but they're all over Ireland, from the Dublin mountains down to the furthest point of Kerry; and wherever there's one it's a token that Diarmuid and Grainne rested a night in that place. And your honour's heard all this before, I'll be bound; for it's not my story. All the old people that have any stories at all know it for true. I've heard it from Galway men and Limerick men; yes, and from a Donegal man, a queer creature entirely, the heavens be his bed! He was a sort of a hermit, and carried rosaries and holy medals and the like; and he'd foot it almost from one end of Ireland to the other, and then he'd go into some place, no one knew where, till one of the great Church festivals would be coming round. And this man had all the fights between Diarmuid and the Feine; and how Oscar stood up for Diarmuid, and would by no means have him treacherously slain; and how at the last Fionn made as if he forgave him, and let him have Grainne, and sent them away. But he meant mischief all the while; for before they'd had time to get comfortable, he set on foot a grand hunting of the boar with whose life Diarmuid's was bound up. Well, sir; you've heard the rest?"

"No, never; I've only read it as it was set down from the mouth of an old man in Islay, off the west coast of Scotland, just

as far off as your Arran Isles are from Clare. A Mr. Campbell, one of the Clan Diarmuid, used to go round and get these tales from all sorts of people. And that's just what I wanted to do, to see how far yours was like his. So go on, please."

And then he told all about the hunting, and how Diarmuid slew the boar, and then Fionn set him to see the length of him by pacing his back. "Measure him against the hair," said Fionn; and, as Diarmuid did it, a venomous bristle pierced his foot, and he fell a-dying. And then followed Fionn's remorse, and how he would cure the dying man by bringing him in his clasped palms a drink from a certain well. But as he was stooping down to give him the water, he thought of Grainne and his wrongs; and his hands relaxed, and the water trickled out, and Diarmuid died.

I did not take it down at the time. How could I, in a cabin full of people, with no light but the peat fire? The old man was full of delight at hearing that among the Gael in Alban (Scotland) these stories are still current.

"Blood's stronger than water," he said, "and they're our brothers, after all. Isn't the very name of Scot from Scota, the King's daughter of Egypt, who ran off with the Milesians and came with them to Ireland? And was not Scotland colonised from Antrim?"

Then I asked had he heard of Arthur and Lancelot and the Welsh tales; for the likeness between the Lancelot and Guinevere legend and that of Diarmuid and Grainne had never before been borne in on me so forcibly. No; he hadn't. The schoolmaster had, of course; but he could not see resemblances, for he was still in the "sun-myth" stage. His "Nation" had dosed him well with Max Mueller and Cox; and he was down upon me at once with the boar, which "proved" Diarmuid to be the same as Adonis. Nevertheless, I held, and still hold, that, Adonis or no Adonis, the Diarmuid story is an earlier form of that of Lancelot, the Gael being an earlier wave of the great Celtic race; and "Lancelot," whatever its Welsh or Breton original may have been, having been altered, almost out of knowledge, to suit the age of chivalry. My old theory is that "Chivalry is of the Celts;" and certainly, even as the Brehon was a humaner, distinctly a better code than that Anglo-Norman law of the working of

* The weird old formula (Campbell, vol. ii., page 411), "I am laying thee under spells . . . to take thy head, and thine ear, and thy wearing of life from off thee, if thou takest rest by night or by day, until," etc. etc.

which Mrs. Green gives such horrible instances in the reign of Henry the Second, so in many little touches Diarmuid is a nobler nature — I do not say than the Laureate's Lancelot, but than the Lancelot of the Round Table. Little delicate touches there are both in the Irish and in the Highland versions, impossible to reproduce in a poetical paraphrase, though Miss Tynan's lines on the running away of the pair are worth quoting:

"... Now, by thy knightly fame
Take me." Her heavy hair was on the ground
And o'er his hands and feet. His eyes gan flame
And flamed and lightened all his dusky face,
Who leaned to her and for a minute's space
Looked on her, thinking how all loss were gain,
To kiss the lovely eyelids in their place;
Yet freed his gaze from her, and loyally
Urged his allegiance to the King. But she:
"Your bonds—your bonds, my knight!" Like
silver rain
Rang through her tears her laughter suddenly.
Yet loyal would he plead; but Oscar spake:
"Now by the vows no knight may take and break—
This woman's words can bend thee to her will.
Away, away, before the sleepers wake."
Then he bent down and swung her from her knee,
And kissed her long and kissed her passionately,
Held to his heart her face so still and chill.
"Sweet, thou and I together till death," said he.

This is excellent, but too modern for the legend in which, as purely if he had been Perceval, Diarmuid lives apart till Fionn consents to annul his betrothal. The old Welsh legends are so generally lost; the red book of Hergest, containing the Mabinogion, is merely the fourteenth century retranslation into Welsh, with suitable alterations, of the Continental romance. I do not know where to look for the Cymric analogue of Diarmuid and Grainne, but I feel certain that it existed, and that it was the basis on which the romance poets and minnesingers built the Lancelot and Guinevere episode. These Celtic tales took the world by storm; as Mr. A. Nutt says in his "Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail" it was Geoffrey of Monmouth who first made them accessible to the lettered class of England and the Continent. He thereby opened up to the world at large a new continent of romantic story, and exercised on the development of literature an influence comparable, in its kind, to that of Columbus's achievement on the course of geographical discovery and political effort. Twenty years had not passed before the British heroes were household words throughout Europe. The much-abused Celt is the father of our Arthurian epic; and the earlier branch, the Gael, evolved

the earliest known form of that legend, the latest rendering of which delights us in the Laureate's "Idylls."

But our discussion in that Burren cabin did not tend that way at all. We began to talk of the neighbourhood — of the cliffs of Moher, which I had seen the day before, and where I met a party of young Salamanca priests as lively as kittens, shouting and singing (I seldom heard "Nora Creina" better rendered; and I then made acquaintance with that Galway national song, "The Blackbird," which I have several times heard since), throwing pebbles over the cliff at the gulls that were sailing some hundreds of feet below, and toasting "The Star of our College—Starvation."

"They didn't seem to have suffered from that lately," I said.

"No," replied some cynic, "before the big famine Ireland was for every one, as the song says, 'a pleasant country for hospitable cheer,' and it's still that same for the clergy, more power to them."

And then, as I remarked how nicely the walks up to the cliff's edge, and the little shrubberies, and paths, and luncheon-houses were kept, they fell to glorifying Colonel O'Brien, and telling how he was a Member of Parliament worth having, for there was never a boy wanted a lift in life but he would manage to get him something in London, or up in Dublin, or somewhere; but all that was changed now. The Colonel was dead, and the young people were in Italy, and no one to take the old man's place. They didn't exclaim against his successor's absenteeism; perhaps he was to come back soon; they had been delighted with the bright dress of the bride, and the long gold chain, so long that it was worn double, which her husband gave her. It was some time before I could get the talk back to the old tales. Everybody could talk about the Colonel and his heir; and so tongues, that before had perforce been still, were set going. We even got on religion; they seemed to scent my faith, though I had not said a word to show what it was.

"Ah," said the "vanitheer," "we'd all get on well enough together, but for the soupers. Many's the black lie I've seen prosper with them in the big famine times. There were some that thought they'd got us then when the hunger was upon us."

"You're right, ma'am," I responded; "to make a man's hunger a lever to move his faith is foolish as well as cruelly wicked."

At last I sketched for them the Grail story: how the cup wherefrom the Lord drank at the Last Supper was kept by Joseph of Arimathea; and in it, at the Crucifixion, he caught the blood which followed the piercing with the soldier's spear. This cup, after many wanderings, he brought to Britain—we know he came to Glastonbury, and there planted his staff, which became the Christmas-blossoming thorn. After him it was kept by a race of kings, all pure, for none but the pure might touch or even look upon it. But at last its keeper sinned grievously, whereupon the spear, which had always been kept with the cup, wounded him, and he lay, sore smitten, yet in a trance. But the cup went up to heaven, and now only sometimes could even the purest get a glimpse of it. And that was the San Grail, or holy basin. And once, when it had slid along a lightning-flash, and had half shown itself to the knights at Camelot, they all vowed to go in search of it; but none might touch it, save the wholly pure Sir Galahad; while of the rest none could even set eyes on it, save Perceval, pure, in deed, though not in thought, and Bors, who, sinning once, had ever since repented.

"And now," asked I, "is there anything like that in your old stories?"

Well, yes, there was, though like the latter part only. The different castles, for instance, that Perceval, the real hero of the Quest, for Galahad is a later invention, comes to—Castle Perilous, the Castle of the Spells, and so on—are in scores of the old tales.

One the story-teller gave me, in which the seeker for adventure comes upon a castle that has no hole in it big enough for a mouse to go in. He paces round and round, and is going off in despair, when, suddenly, as he looks again, it has a window for every day, and a door for every month in the year. The Grail, too, which provides meat and drink for all comers, and for each that which his soul most lusteth after, is surely Fionn's enchanted cup, which, among its other virtues, cures wounds, and restores to life those slain in battle.

Of course there are differences, and, therefore, difficulties. In the Gaelic tale, Fionn has the mystic cup; and Fionn, in many points, is the analogue of Arthur. But, as Mr. Nutt remarks, "there is a great fusion of the old stories in the romances." Romancers picked out what suited them, and pieced them to-

gether in what they thought the most sensational way. One great point of resemblance is that, whereas the Grail was thought by its presence to bring meats of all kinds for the visitors to an enchanted castle, so of "the caldron of Dagda"—one of the three treasures of the earliest Irish—it is said, "a company used not ever to go away from it unsatisfied."

And, as for the cup belonging to Fionn, Arthur's analogue, this is not always so. In "Conall Gulban," one of the best of J. F. Campbell's folk-tales, the winner of the "flask of balsam"—three drops from which bring the slain back to life—is not the King, but Conall the champion, who in many points, for example, in his passing unscathed the lions who are on either side of the great fortress gate, is the exact analogue of Perceval.

The sum of the matter, then, is, that in the Grail story, as we have it in Chrestien of Troyes and the other metrical romancers, and in the prose of Malory, there are two wholly incongruous parts—the Christian myth about Joseph and the Last Supper and the soldier's spear, and tacked on to this, an old heathen story altered and adapted into "the Quest of the Grail."

Of this latter, Perceval is the true hero; he who, brought up in the wilds, comes as an uncouth half-savage to Arthur's Court; just as in the Gaelic folk-lore, "the great fool," under many names, comes to the Court of the King of Eirinn. All the castles, and damsels, and dwarfs, and lions are simply heathen, belonging to what Mr. Matthew Arnold called "the magic of the Celt."

Even the "loathly damsel," whom Malory's readers will remember, has her exact parallel in "the grewsome carlin" (hag), who always comes in in the Welsh and Gaelic tales. As far as any trace is left of the old heathen Welsh legend, the Gaelic Fionn seems to be that mysterious "Bran the blessed," who also has a magic cup, and who, in the Christianised romance, becomes Brons, the Fisher-King. Fionn, indeed, was a fisher par excellence, and his catching and tasting "the salmon of wisdom" gave him his pre-eminence, as a like chance made Merlin wise.

All this very unchristian and very archaic machinery in the second part of the Grail romance, "the Quest," is unexplainable on any other supposition. In-

deed, Mr. Nutt, the latest and fullest exponent of a view already put forth by Villemarqué, by Emile Souvestre ("Foyer Breton"), and by J. F. Campbell, makes it absolutely certain that "the Quest" is, at bottom, a heathen Celtic story, complete analogues of which are found in existing Gaelic, if not in Cymric folk-lore. Where were the two parts pieced together? In Britain, Mr. Nutt thinks, because here, somehow, the Gospel of Nicodemus, in which Joseph of Arimathea is the central figure, was very much better known than it was on the Continent. Here then is, at any rate, a working hypothesis—Grail legend, part i., Christian, developed out of the Gospel of Nicodemus; part ii., heathen, adapted from Welsh, or Breton—probably Welsh—folk-tales.

But I didn't try to tell all this to the company, who grew, like myself, sleeper and sleeper, while the story-teller went on and on with his castles, and damsels, and magic cups of healing. It was delightful to doze off and wake, and find him still telling the never-ending tale, into which I suspect the teller often interpolates some fresh adventure if he finds he has not talked everybody to sleep with the authorised version. I could have stayed there all night, coiled up in the warm corner; but a few began to go, and my host would put me into the guest-room, where it was stuffy and damp, for the one pane of glass let into the wall was immovable. I could not sleep, and when I heard the story-teller depose, and snatches of song followed by the preparatory scraping of a fiddle, I came out, and jig followed jig till with "the top of the morning to you," and a draught of milk, and more stirabout from the caldron that seemed as inexhaustible as Fionn's, and shy, kindly good-byes from the half-dozen girls who had stayed for the dance, I went on my way to Ballyvaughan.

That's one of the very few times when I've heard from a peasant's mouth any of the Ossianic tales. Ever since then, I've been wanting to show the connection between the two epics—the Ossianic and the Arthurian. I should have begun with the Diarmuid, or Lancelot episode; Mr. Nutt has begun with that of Perceval, namely, the "Grail Quest." Possibly the Wagner music has given fresh interest to this story in its Germanised form. Anyhow, he has done his work so well that I hope he will soon go on to the rest of the cycle.

THRIFT MADE EASY.

"YOU have lost your husband; he was a good workman, and a good servant. He has left, I hear, a large family, and I should like to help you till your children can support themselves. What sum shall I allow you weekly?" These words were addressed to a poor woman by a manufacturer at Birmingham.

"I am thankful, sir, for your kindness," said the widow, in reply. "My husband always gave me fifteen shillings a week to keep house; but we have not him to keep. If you will give me ten shillings a week, we shall manage to get on."

That workman had been earning thirty-five shillings a week, and had spent one pound upon his own selfish pleasures. In spite of working-men's clubs, and temperance societies, and other elevating institutions, men of this stamp still exist in large numbers, and throw ridicule and scorn upon all who urge them to put by something for a rainy day.

Those who are inclined to be thrifty have abundant openings presented to them for aving. "Put twa pennies in a purse, and they will creep together," says a Scotch proverb. Penny banks are a great blessing, but they would be a greater blessing if they could be brought to the doors of the people. Much has been said and written against collecting friendly societies; but, if there were no collectors, every industrial assurance company would have to close its doors, for the working classes would never take their weekly premiums to the office. The plan was tried years ago, and proved an utter failure. Through the agency of the collector, thrift is made easy to working men and women.

The writer recently spent several days in the company of insurance agents, in the manufacturing districts, going with them into the homes of the people. These districts varied in point of respectability; in one district it was no unusual thing for the agent to draw from one house premiums amounting to five shillings; in another, the premiums ranged from twopence to sixpence. In some cases the money had to be collected at a given hour; if the agent called a little later than usual, his money was spent.

Those who declaim against insurance-collecting societies, would be astonished at the good feeling which exists between the agents and the assured. What's in a

name? As a rule, it is the agent, and not the society, in which the people put their faith. The man is everything; the society nothing. The collector has free admittance to every house; he is regarded as a guide, philosopher, and friend, and is consulted upon all sorts of questions.

There are now a number of insurance companies who devote their energies almost exclusively to business of providing for funerals; and, for one penny per week, the means for a decent funeral are guaranteed. The working classes have large families, and can only just manage to live from hand to mouth, and cannot lay by for such a contingency as death; and to this class the value of such institutions strongly appeals. Thus, when death takes their child from them, and their heart is charged with grief to the fullest, they can at least be spared the anxiety entailed by want of means to lay the little one beneath the ground.

"Little by little," remarked an insurance editor, "we have learnt the value of insurance as a bulwark against the contingencies which make havoc of human fortunes; but," he asked, "is it not a little strange, and very regrettable, that no efficient machinery exists for insuring clerks against the loss of employment?"

It is not a little strange to hear of the existence of an editor who has never heard of the "efficient machinery" worked at Manchester and Liverpool for insuring clerks against the evils resulting from loss of employment.

The Manchester Warehousemen and Clerks' Provident Association was established in 1855; and, since its formation, upwards of five thousand one hundred and fifty members have received allowances, amounting in the aggregate to twenty-six thousand, eight hundred pounds. For a contribution of two shillings a month, it pays to a member out of work one pound a week for the first four weeks; ten shillings a week for eight weeks; five shillings a week for twelve weeks. For four shillings a month, double benefits are given. The same amounts are paid in cases of sickness; assistance granted to members in any special case of distress, and annuities to members of sixty years of age who have been subscribers to the Association for twenty years.

Moreover, the Association endeavours to find situations for its members. The secretary daily attends the Manchester Royal Exchange, and is in constant com-

munication with the leading employers in the district. Some idea of his energy in this department may be gathered from the fact that during 1887 he answered one thousand and twelve advertisements; one hundred and eighty-five situations were offered to the Association, and one hundred and three accepted. We ought to add that no pressure is brought to bear upon a member; he is quite at liberty to accept or decline any situation offered by the Association.

A similar association exists in Belfast, as well as in Liverpool; possibly many other towns have agencies of a like character. The Liverpool Clerks' Association advertises itself as the perfected system of employment agency, and claims to be the best mutual insurance company existing.

These societies are, however, purely local in their scope. A national society, securing members against loss of employment, has yet to be established; against sickness, something has already been attempted.

In the complacency begotten of the prevalent ignorance regarding the ways in which people bring disease upon themselves, Dr. Fleming Phillips forcibly points out that it is generally taken for granted by those who are well, that they are going to continue well. Consequently, when they are overtaken by disease, they are too frequently unprepared to meet it and the pecuniary demands that it entails. Among those demands, a doctor's bill is never the lightest; sometimes it is the heaviest. If it be the breadwinner who is thus disabled, the difficulty is all the more serious; and the patient may be permanently crippled in means as well as in health.

"Is there no device," asks Dr. Phillips, "by which protection may be had from this most serious risk? Even if we cannot prevent the illness, can we not do something to lessen its lamentable results?"

The working classes have long ago answered these questions for themselves, and five millions of them are estimated to have insured themselves against sickness. Their organisations, such as the Foresters and the Oddfellows, do not, however, meet the wants of clerks and the middle classes generally.

Prior to 1885, no organisation existed for enabling this class to meet the extra expense incurred by sickness. In that year there was founded at Edinburgh a Sickness Assurance Association, which has already issued over ten thousand policies. For

an annual payment of one pound seven shillings from the age of twenty, the Association makes an allowance of one pound a week during incapacity, either through sickness or accident. For larger allowances, larger premiums are expected; but we understand that in no case does the Association insure to the full extent of a person's income. It does not insure women at all, because they have too many ailments, and, moreover, it is very difficult to define incapacity in their case; but the Association is, undoubtedly, meeting a felt want, and deserves to succeed. The writer has himself experienced the benefit of the Association.

"Pensions for Clergymen," was the heading of a newspaper paragraph, a short time ago, which stated that a lady had given twenty thousand pounds towards the creation of a fund for assisting with pensions the clergy of the Liverpool diocese, who may have become unfit for the discharge of their duties through infirmity. Laymen, not provided for by a generous Government, are forced to provide their own pensions, if they want to live in ease when their step becomes feeble, and their hair turns grey.

"I should have insured when I was a young man, with no cares and responsibilities," said a bookkeeper of fifty to the writer. The premium, he lamented, was too heavy for him to pay now; and his chances of ever being free from what Charles Lamb called "This thorn of a desk" seemed very remote. His employers, he explained, were never known to give pensions: when a man could not do his work he was turned adrift.

But a man should be prepared against being "turned adrift." How? By means of an Endowment Policy. Some insurance companies will accept monthly payments; and he could have his policy payable at fifty, or fifty-five, or sixty, and, with profits, it would amount to a nice little sum to fall back upon. With this money he could buy an annuity for life, and he would enjoy the "glorious privilege of being independent," all the more from the fact that he bought it himself. In brief, then, a pension for life is within the reach of nearly all classes, by means of an endowment policy, which secures

1. A sum of money at a given age.
2. A provision for a family in case of the death of the assured before the endowment matures.

By this plan a man may reap the benefit

of his prudence; if he should die, his family will reap the benefit.

Since the year 1881, the German Government has been developing a vast system of National Insurance, which is destined ultimately to embrace the whole of the labouring classes. There is already besides an Employers' Liability Law, one which compels the working-men to insure against sickness; and it was the earnest hope of the late German Emperor, and Prince Bismarck, to see the final development of this principle in a law compelling the working-man to insure against old age, and so to make provision for his declining years. It is somewhat surprising to find this system—which is generally looked upon as a pet project of a certain section of Socialists—flourishing under the auspices of so despotic a Government as that of Germany. But a good gift is good whencesoever it comes; and we might well welcome compulsory thrift on the German principle to this country.

AN OLD MAN'S DREAM.

AH, child! I watch you with the firelight's gleam
Lighting the beauties of your golden hair,
Nestling within the glories of your eyes,
And kissing tenderly your cheek so fair.
Your bright young life is stretching on before,
Whilst all my youth is in the far away;
I dream but of the time to come no more,
Whilst you have hardly ventur'd into day!

And yet I love you with a love as pure
As ever found its birth in human breast,
I love you with a love that will endure,
And hold you ever as its first and best.
How I have watch'd, as one would do a flower,
Your many charms, my darling, soft unfold,
Longing to shelter you thro' storm and shower—
But you are young, my dear, and I am old!

It would not do to place your slender hand
Within mine own, save for a little space;
It would not do for you and me to stand
Before the altar in God's sacred place.
Another one will come and woo, and win—
A lover, with a youth as bright as thine—
And I will keep my envious thoughts within,
And pray that you may taste Love's joy divine.

May and December are not made to wed,
Spring's sun and winter's snow can never meet.
God bless thee!—there is no more to be said—
And keep thee fair and pure for him, my sweet!
Dream in the firelight, I am watching near,
Weave all your tender fancies o'er again;
May all life's happiness be yours, my dear,
Only for me the solitude and pain!

AN OLD SCHOOLMISTRESS.

A SKETCH FROM LIFE.

SHE was a relic of a past generation—a survival of the earlier days of the century—who might have shaken hands with Miss

Pinkerton in the dignified retirement, which doubtless crowned that worthy lady's latter days; or expressed in discreet terms her tenderness for the local curate to the sympathising ears of Miss Austen's Emmas and Charlottes, and received in return the blushing avowal of their affection and esteem for Edward or Henry.

When we knew her she was old—immeasurably old—to our school-girl fancy. Her exact age was a veiled mystery, and we considered her a centenarian at least. She must really have been very much over eighty in the days when she kept school for us on exactly the same system as she kept school for our mothers and grandmothers before us; we were harassed with no "exams.," Oxford or Cambridge "locals" had no horrors for us. French was taught by a young woman, with large feet and thick waist, who came from Switzerland, and instructed us also in German and Italian; our music soared only to the accomplishment of a "Fantasia de Salon," with a tune and variations; of science or geography we were practically ignorant, and not an "ology" or "ism" found place in our curriculum.

Our domestic and sanitary arrangements were as antiquated as our course of instruction. The fire-place of every room was religiously filled with sacking—if there happened to be a fire-place—and the allowance of hot baths was one at the end of each "half" to each young lady! A large can of warm water was supplied to each room of four once in ten days. This allowance had probably satisfied our mothers, and been considered over-abundant by our grandmothers. I know that old Miss P—— thought the weekly tub, stipulated for by the parents of some of us, a ridiculous and cold-producing fad much to be deprecated.

The nucleus of the school consisted of those forlorn waifs of society, poor little beings known as "Indian children." Eight or nine girls, three or four little boys, sons and daughters of far-away Colonels and Majors, whose substitute for home and parents was the thick fortnightly letter from India, and an occasional visit from some good-natured officer, or his wife, who had promised their anxious mothers to see and report on "the children" while at home. There were many other girls, but we were the backbone of the establishment; spent our holidays at school, were dressed and looked after entirely by old Miss P—— and fared on the whole as well, I dare say,

as if we had been the inmates of a model college, or high-school boarding-house.

The house was a charming old place, taken from the owner on a life-lease. Charles the Second had hidden there, so said tradition, and it was duly haunted by a wicked Duke, according to our version, who promenaded the corridors with a drawn and dripping sword, and also, rather inconsistently, played the piano in the great drawing-room in the small hours of the morning. Perhaps the healthiness of the house was not increased by the fact that a spring had burst up in the front cellar, which contained three feet of stagnant water; but we did not seem to take much harm. At least, I don't remember that we often ailed.

The grey, sleepy old house lay deep in the curve of a sleepy valley, and, looking back at life under Miss P——'s auspices, we seem to have sleepily idled through our days in a perpetual drowsy afternoon. Once a day we went "trottoir," as we phrased it, marching two and two along the same unvarying road, to the commencement of the sleepy market town, and then marching back again, after a tantalising glimpse at its seldom-visited streets. At our head, leaning on the arm of one of the senior girls, marched Miss P——. She was a very small, rather stout woman, ruddy-cheeked and well-preserved, with the brownest of curled false fronts and the whitest of false teeth, short skirts draped high to display a pair of very neat feet, of which she was very proud, and a pair of heavy double eye-glasses dangling over her square velvet jacket. She walked with a springy step, and was very anxious to impress every one with her activity and youth.

To further this end, I suppose, it was the custom for us all, from the head girl to the smallest flaxen-haired boy, to address her as "dear." In every other particular she was formal and precise with the extremest formality and precision of her generation. But, either to show her distance from venerable age, or to impress the casual visitor with our affection for her, we dropped the respectful "ma'am," or "Miss P——," and always called her "dear."

The word sounded very funny from the tow-headed scamp afore-mentioned—a little fiend of mischief and deceit, brought up among grooms, stable-men, and miners, and who, I remember once, paralysed the whole community, and nearly sent the head governess into hysterics, by refusing

to do a sum, with a fluent string of oaths and curses of the warmest description.

Years of school-mistressing, of posing before parents and guardians, had crystallised upon the old lady, leaving her with no emotions to speak of, and an excellent digestion.

Miss P——'s correspondence with the admirable Mrs. Chapone herself could not have been more stilted and formal than the letters which accompanied the half-yearly bill to the relation of each girl. They were written on thin paper, in violet ink, and fine-pointed characters, and were full of capitals, dashes, and points of exclamation. Three together were the usual number: "!!!"

Here is a sentence from one of these epistles lying before me:

"Your dear daughter has conducted herself to the satisfaction of myself and also of her excellent teachers throughout the half-year that has just elapsed. Her studies have tended, I trust, to the cultivation of mind, and refinement of manners, so essential in the young !!!"

This sentence, with slight variation, was the burden of each letter accompanying the half-yearly bill. We were always described as little models of deportment and propriety, though Heaven knows this was far from a true description of most of us.

The ceremony of "breaking up" occupied the whole week preceding the day of departure. Miss P—— composed notes and drew up bills. Ourselves and our "excellent teachers" had entire holiday. One evening there assembled a crowd of relatives and friends, and we gave a concert in the "blue drawing-room." We all performed something—from "Roeckel's Storm Rondeau," executed by one of the senior girls, whose parents considered her a second Arabella Goddard, to a trio, pleasingly entitled "Diamond Sprays," thumped in concert, with much squeezing and pushing, by three little sisters, while the music-mistress murmured an audible "one, two, three, four."

After the concert we each received a prize or a "mark of approbation," so there were no jealousies, and our parents were satisfied of the general excellency of our behaviour, even if we had not attained a prize. Such little prodigies of goodness as had been able to keep their conduct-books free of "noughts" also had a blue bow pinned on the right shoulder. "Noughts" were round O's placed against the name for bad behaviour, and marking a deeper stain of

iniquity than an X. When the O's amounted to forty during the half-year, the wretched culprit forfeited her right even to a "mark of approbation," and was looked upon by all as a sort of criminal. But this seldom occurred.

With the departure of the "excellent teachers," and the "English girls," all rules of discipline were relaxed, and we "Indians" disported at our ease under no severer guardianship than that of old Miss P——'s maid, who sold us chocolate and toffee at a premium; lent us an occasional shilling when we had forestalled our pocket-money; and never "reported" any of our ill-doings. We picked flowers, paddled in the brook—how the nettles on the bank stung one's ankles!—and fished for minnows in the pool below the waterfall. We ransacked an empty coachman's cottage, which we were strictly forbidden to approach, after forcing back the catch of the window with a penknife in the most approved burglar-fashion. We were very disappointed, I remember, at finding nothing mysterious or awful in its four deserted rooms, such as mouldering bones, or blood-stained documents. Even the apples, ranged in rows along the floor, hardly consoled us, though we risked detection, and the wrath of "Billy," the surly gardener, and pocketed as many as we could. We ranged about the great empty stables, after climbing a wall, and demolishing the top of an ancient water-butt, through which our intrepid pioneer thrust her foot and leg, and was hauled back with much difficulty and stifled laughter.

The remembrance of the scene is clear as I write. The grass-grown stable-yards; the deserted pigeon-cote leaning crazily on one side; great doors hanging on rusty hinges; empty boxes; and rickety ladders, leading to vast, dim lofts; great elms, and blue sky shutting in the picture on one side; on the other, the tiled roofs of the stables and coach-house, all moss-grown and weather-stained; the wooden clock-tower, and the clock that had not gone for thirty years and more.

Thanks to plenty of fresh air and a very bountiful table, we escaped a great many of the ills to which we were logically entitled by all the laws of hygiene, considering our primitive drainage and water-filled cellar. Well for us that it was so, for Miss P——'s doctoring was on the most elementary principles, and she had a rooted objection to sending for the doctor. One of the

little boys fell while playing one day, and complained continually of pain in his wrist for six weeks after. It got so swollen, that at last he was sent to the doctor, who pronounced that one of the small bones had been broken at the time of his fall!

For all ailments to which school-girl flesh is heir, Miss P—— administered a glass of hot sherry-and-water and two rhubarb pills. Every complaint was treated with this remedy. If we were feverish, if we were chilly, if we had a cold in the head, a cough, or a pain in the back, a tumbler of hot wine-and-water and a couple of pills on a plate were brought to the patient's bedroom when she went to bed by the maid, who saw that both medicines were duly despatched. One of us, who suffered from peculiarly cold hands, enjoyed this treat almost nightly in winter, as she made a point of laying her deadly chilly fingers on the old lady's warm hands while wishing her "good night." Miss P—— would have considered the omission of the pills, and the administration of sherry-and-water alone, as distinctly immoral and tending to intemperance.

But I remember that, on one occasion, the pills were given without the sherry. A number of the elder girls, during term-time—the "half," as it was called in our day—stole into the kitchen-garden and feasted on apples and plums of unutterable hardness and greenness. We were caught in the act by "Billy," the cross gardener, a pronounced misogynist and an old bachelor, who lived by himself at the lodge, and detested the sight of the "young ladies."

He reported us, and we were summoned to Miss P——'s room, where we were very severely lectured. Nine noughts were placed against each of our names—why nine I do not know—and the pill-box sent for. We were ten sinners, and, on the box being opened, only six pills were found. Nothing daunted, the old lady sent off her maid to the town, a mile and a half distant, for a fresh supply, while we waited, seated in two rows; and the old lady alternately read her paper and resumed her lecture. It was a warm, spring day, and the sun shone outside with provoking splendour, and flickered through the branches of the old cedar by the window, filling the room with moving, dancing points of light.

We all sat very still and very bored, mentally devising plans of vengeance on the abhorred "Billy." When the pills arrived, we each took two in two gulps of

water, under the old lady's stern eye, and retired, stiff and wrathful, feeling that she had had the best of us.

As years went by, the school dwindled and left poor old Miss P——, though she never formally retired. Even the "Indians" failed her at last, and she remained almost alone in the big, deserted house, resolutely fighting with her approaching death. She was not a religious woman; the formula of belief only was hers, with whom life had all more or less been a formula and conventional show. One of her strongest aversions was any approach on the part of the local clergyman to "serious conversation." He and his wife came weekly, and played at cards with her from half-past seven till half-past nine, but neither ever dared to make any reference to her approaching end. She was never actually ill, and never took to her bed, and to the last she feebly struggled about the empty house and neglected gardens with a forlorn attempt at her old activity. One evening they found her in her arm-chair in her great, dim sitting-room, the newspaper fallen from between her hands, and her head sunk as if in sleep. She had been all alone and dead in the darkening room for more than an hour.

SUPERSTITION AND EVIDENCE.

SUPERSTITION may be defined as a perversion or exaggeration of an instinct common to humanity; the instinct, namely, to believe in the supernatural. That superstition has its roots in human nature itself, we may readily enough admit, when we remember how universally widespread it was, how desperately it has clung to mankind, with what difficulty and after how many years it has been practically subdued. For its subjection has been only partial after all, in spite of the prosaic tendency of science and education, and, although we shall never return to the gross and crude beliefs of former days, yet evidence is not wanting that, under modern culture and modern learning, there still lies a vein of superstition ready to manifest itself upon occasion. Of course there are many who are entirely proof against what they would call the folly of bygone ages; but, perhaps, these are the exceptions which prove the rule, while we must remember that Free-thinkers like the Emperor Frederick the Second, were not uncommon even in the most unenlightened and superstitious days.

That man is naturally a superstitious animal the records of biography and history show plainly enough; and, in our own day, will any one deny that omens and presentiments, for example, have not still their believers? Do we not constantly hear "authenticated" stories of haunted houses? Do not spirit manifestations and eccentricities startle us now and again even in this commonplace century?

Men's minds are not yet ruled absolutely by the laws of exact science. May that cast-iron despotism be still far distant! But, in truth, it is difficult for the student to say where rational belief ends and superstition begins. Until science has unfolded every secret of the universe, until every law which governs not only the physical but the mental world, has been clearly enunciated, until we can explain the reason of every apparent deviation from what appears a normal state of matters, there will still be room for the imagination to wander amidst the regions of the occult.

Why, we may ask, should it be natural to believe in an existence after death, and superstition to believe in the possibility of apparitions and similar phenomena? Or, why may it be natural to believe in the existence of powers of evil, and superstitious to believe that there may be communications between them and human beings? These questions seem difficult of solution; and, indeed, one whom no one will accuse of credulity, Dr. von Hartmann, admits that it is impossible to set aside the evidence for the truth of such phenomena as those of presentiments, wraiths, and apparitions, and acknowledges that their existence is in perfect harmony with his advanced philosophy.

The truth is, that it requires a long experience to decide what may be true in regard to the supernatural, and what is undoubtedly false—an experience which the loose observation and the fatal method of reasoning prevalent in bygone times was incapable of using. For even if we were to admit that all things may be possible, it does not follow necessarily that all things actually happen, or are even likely to happen.

Forgetfulness of this simple rule betrayed our forefathers into paroxysms of terror, which resulted in the most atrocious cruelties. Thus, even if it were thought possible for misguided women to take midnight excursions on a broomstick in order to be present at conventicles of a some-

what unorthodox nature, yet it would require a considerable amount of evidence to persuade rational beings, who did not themselves possess that power, or had not actually seen it exercised, that human beings had actually done so. The best exculpatory evidence would have been that at the time the accused were supposed to have been absent on their unlawful errand, they were actually, where they should have been, in bed by the side of their lawful husbands. But this was not sufficient for the sapient Judges of mediæval times. They were perfectly certain that the accused were at the witches' sabbath—there could be no doubt of that, for torture had wrung that confession out of them, or their accomplices—and the thing to be accounted for was their apparent presence at home.

This was easily done; it was explained that an obliging demon assumed the appearance and took the place of the absent wife in order to prevent suspicion falling upon her.

Another thing, which, in less prejudiced minds than those of mediæval ecclesiastics and Judges, might have awakened suspicion as to the reality of the witches' power, was the curious fact that they never used these powers to escape from their persecutors, or to bring vengeance upon them. This, however, was easily explained. So far from proving, or suggesting, that witches never had been anything else but harmless, this fact was rather evidence against them. For Satan was unable to resist lawfully-constituted authority according to the popular theory; and, therefore, the accused must needs be the servants of Satan, seeing that they were incapable of defending themselves. There was one case on record, however, of a witch who, when she was actually tied to the stake, breathed in her executioner's face with a terrible curse; the result of which was that a hideous leprosy broke out upon the unhappy man, and he expired a few days later.

Slight inconsistencies like this did not, however, as a rule, trouble the minds of that enlightened age.

Culture and education did very little to emancipate men's minds from the degrading superstitions regarding witchcraft. It was at the dawn of modern culture that this belief reached its higher development. It required, as before mentioned, an enlightened experience, along with a capacity for reading that experience aright, to destroy so hideous a faith which lay like a nightmare on Europe. Leo the Tenth was

a cultured and learned pontiff, not over credulous in religious matters, and grievously suspected by historians of latent paganism, yet he was ruthless in ordering the extirpation and persecution of witches, and even issued a bull to that effect. While, on the other hand, what is most curious of all, an Irish synod, in the ninth century, condemned those who believed in the possibility of sorcery and witchcraft, and refused to admit such to communion until they had recanted their error.

Although a belief in sorcery has existed more or less in all periods of ecclesiastical history up to comparatively modern times, yet the ninth and eleventh centuries were comparatively free from such belief. And the systematic persecution of witches did not begin until the fourteenth century, while the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were famous for a terrible epidemic of witchcraft, and for the frenzied cruelty practised upon the unhappy victims of popular superstition.

The whole history of magic and magical rites is full of interest, and is a connecting link between nations widely separate in point of space and time. We find manifestations of sorcery curiously similar as to details in Egypt, Greece, and Rome, down to more modern times and modern nations. The ghastly description of magic rites, given by Horace in two well-known passages, might almost serve as a picture of a mediæval witches' meeting; while the wax figures of Greek magic reappear in the stories of malignant witchcraft of later days.

Two things are found to characterise all witchcraft—the possibility of holding communication with the dead and the invisible powers of darkness, and the power of doing mischief to obnoxious people by means of charms and spells. The ingredients of these charms are very similar in all nations, and consist, in part at least, of fragments of the dead.

But while sorcery is common to Pagan and Christian times, occult beings and powers had a terror for Christians unknown to ancient Greece and Rome. In the first place, with the development of Christianity, the realms of darkness received a large addition in the persons of the gods and goddesses of ancient times. These divinities had caused no terror in the ancient joyous Greek life; they had been easily pleased, and for the most part had sympathised with men. But the Church taught that these were demons,

whose sole employment was to lure mankind to eternal damnation. Then with Christianity new value had been given to the individual soul; and the terror of being among the lost, in eternal agonies, shook the minds of the stoutest. To the fears of temporal disaster were added the terrors of untold spiritual dangers from the numberless demons always on the watch to entrap men and to hurl them into ruin. Life could not have been altogether happy under these circumstances; fears within and without must have characterised the lives of many in early and mediæval days.

But for a while the Church found a remedy, as indeed it was her business to do, in what has been called sacred magic. Consecrated candles, oil, bread, water, the relics of saints were all talismans or charms against the powers of evil, while to the priesthood belonged the right and privilege of casting out demons. Yet, after a while, these weapons of spiritual warfare grew strangely dull, and the world became an arena in which demons and men fought in unequal combat; the reality of the terrors of the supernatural were vividly present to men's minds, and stories of demons in bodily shapes, actually tempting the saints themselves to ruin, were numerous.

But still with regard to sorcery and invocation of demons the Church hesitated for long as to their treatment. Sometimes, while of course admitting the reality of the existence of demons, she denied the possibility of human communication with them. More often she admitted it, but does not seem to have taken very active steps against it, until comparatively late in her history; and for long sorcery was mildly punished even in the case of ecclesiastics. The fact is that the Church was so occupied in consolidating her temporal supremacy, and extending her jurisdiction, that for long she had little leisure to attend to anything of less importance. But when her empire was established and her supremacy secure, then internal affairs took up her attention, and heresy and witchcraft attracted notice. Heresy was, of course, according to the then current theology, the deadliest sin into which a human being could fall. It was the mother of all crimes and abominations, and when, as at last was done, sorcery and witchcraft were included in that designation, special attention was given to them. Mr. Lea, in his magnificent "History of the Inquisition," has traced

the development of witchcraft and its subsequent classification, under the head of heresy, with great minuteness. It was not until late in the thirteenth century that the Inquisition took cognisance of both divination and sorcery as well as of the more ordinary forms of heresy.

Pope Alexander the Fourth issued a bull in 1257, stating that while Inquisitors were not to be turned from their proper duties, if any case of sorcery seemed to include manifest heresy, they should certainly take cognisance of it. This was the opportunity of the Inquisition; and they did not let it slip. It was found that sorcerers frequently made an illegitimate use of the sacraments. The Inquisitors promptly regarded this as equivalent to heretical views regarding these ordinances, and in this way the Inquisition gradually extended its power over supposed dealers in magic arts.

Invocation of demons, they also maintained, argued heretical views with regard to these beings. In short, the ingenuity of the Inquisition surmounted every difficulty in the way of their having complete jurisdiction over the souls and bodies of men. But sorcery and witchcraft developed as the persecution against them increased in severity, nor were the Popes themselves exempt from the accusations of sorcery, or from the machinations of sorcerers.

Sylvester the Second (1000-1003, A.D.) had a great reputation as a magician, gained by his studies at Toledo, then a growing school of learning; while John the Twenty-second (1316-1344) was actually assailed by magic arts. The conspirators against his life confessed that at first they intended to use poison, but failing opportunity, had resorted to spells and charms to gain their end. They were promptly executed, and the Pope set to work to root out all dealers in the occult arts. Special Inquisitors were, in the year 1318, appointed to investigate into the matter throughout all the Western world, and we are told that John endeavoured also to enlist the sympathies, and gain the help of the Oriental Patriarchs and Archbishops in his crusade against the powers of darkness.

This action of John the Twenty-second may be regarded as the first universal attempt to seriously extirpate witchcraft and sorcery from Christendom. Then shortly grew up the stories so familiar to us all, of the witches' sabbath, of the nocturnal

meetings with Satan, of the worship of the devil, and of the wild, demoniacal revels which so terrified our forefathers. The infection rapidly spread throughout the fourteenth century, and, by the beginning of the next, had developed into a veritable delirium of terror. Between the years 1404 and 1554 no less than thirty thousand victims of this wild superstition were burned by the Inquisition alone.

We may certainly attribute some part at least of this terrible state of things to a form of insanity. There can be hardly any doubt but that many of the accused truly believed themselves possessed of supernatural power. This hysterical kind of belief might easily be epidemic to a certain extent, and provide the Holy Office with numerous victims, who generally believed themselves to be guilty. But in such days it was certainly necessary for people to be careful and guarded in their language. A threat of revenge, followed by disastrous accidents to the property or person of the threatened individual, might lead to the most serious consequences to the rash and hasty speaker, with an introduction to the Inquisitor, having the stake as a result. Innocent people had little chance if once seriously accused; torture soon drew full confession from prisoners, hopelessly inculcating others as well as themselves, and confession was usually followed by execution.

There was no limit to the wild credulity of the times. No story was too wildly improbable to be believed; no power too great to be attributed to the witch. Little girls, daughters of witches, possessed superhuman powers conferred by their mothers' arts; and the alleged naïve display of those powers frequently led their mothers to the stake.

Of course, had the smallest suspicion existed that confessions wrung by torture from the unhappy victims were not altogether to be trusted, things might not have gone to the extent they did; but torture was then, except in England, fully recognised as an infallible means of getting at the truth.

Even in England, the infamous practice of testing for witches by means of thrusting long needles into their bodies to find the insensibility of pain which was bestowed by Satan on his worshippers, served the purposes of more elaborate torture well enough. Thus the whole history of witchcraft, during the fifteenth

and sixteenth centuries, is a long history of terror, credulity, and cruelty—a dreadful instance of “man’s inhumanity to man.”

The causes of the epidemic of witchcraft may be briefly summed up. There was, in the first place, as we have seen, a natural tendency in the human mind to believe and to welcome the marvellous—a tendency indulged more or less in all countries and in all ages. This was the foundation on which the wild and terrible stories were built. An undoubted impulse was given in an evil direction by the classification of witchcraft with heresy, instead of with insanity, as ought to have been done. But a new importance was given to it by this means, and more urgent reasons for hunting the sorcerer to death. Stories of devil-worship, and such like heretical practices of olden times, were next revived, causing new horror and fear to those who heard them. A morbid vanity now, doubtless, induced many to lay claim to the possession of arts so terrible and so important; and from these half-crazed wretches torture, and the ingenious questions of the Inquisitors, soon extorted stories enough to terrify whole nations, and to involve the honour and lives of thousands. Thus the epidemic began to spread, and soon raged terribly.

The Church beheld with fear an apparently rival spiritual power threatening her very existence. The gates of hell seemed opened for the destruction of the Church. Her rites and ceremonies now seemed to avail but little against the charms and spells of the witch. They might keep the charm at bay for a while; but the spell once cast, the Church was powerless to remove it. This, we may remark in passing, was not to be wondered at; for what often passed as the malignant work of the witch, was often the result of disease or accident, which spells holy or unholy were powerless to affect. To such a height did terror rise, that witches were no longer bound in twos or threes, but literally in hundreds at one time.

Thus the dawn of modern civilisation was ushered in amid the frenzy of superstition and savage cruelty. But the rational interpretation of experience at last gained the day, and official belief in sorcery gradually passed away. Yet popular belief lingered long in secluded parts, and may, perhaps, in some places, be only now passing away for ever.

CONFESSIONS OF A CARETAKER.

A SERIAL STORY.

By “RITA.”

Author of “*Dame Durden*,” “*Darby and Joan*,” “*My Lord Consett*,” etc.

CHAPTER XXIII. PROMISED BLISS.

A WEEK later, Mr. Carruthers left for the West Indies.

It had been a hurried, feverish week—all preparation, and arrangements, and shopping, and rushing about; and Miss Kate had thrown herself feverishly into it, giving herself no rest at all. The boys came from school to bid their father farewell, and they were always with her. I think Mr. Tresyllion kept carefully out of her way that week. No doubt—I thought to myself, bitterly—he had his reasons for doing it. He knew his time would come.

Then, as soon as Mr. Carruthers had gone, Miss Kate started off for Templecombe, and I remained behind in charge of the town house. I felt very sad and low-spirited as I saw my young mistress go. She looked so pale, so worried, so heart-broken, that I knew, only too well, what a terrible battle she must have been fighting with herself. I could only hope that the children might comfort her, or, at least, occupy her thoughts sufficiently to prevent that morbid dwelling upon one idea, which is, in itself, so often a cause for self-created unhappiness.

Two days after she had left town I answered the door to a visitor in the shape of Mr. Tresyllion. He looked a little conscious as he saw me. The house answered for itself the question on his lips. Shuttered windows and closed rooms spoke of departure only too plainly.

“Has your—has Mrs. Carruthers left town?” he said, eagerly.

“Yes, sir,” I answered.

He fumbled about with his card-case; in his nervousness, dropping two or three on the steps.

“Can you tell me,” he asked, “if she has gone for any length of time? Won’t she finish out the season?”

“I believe not, sir,” I answered, stiffly. “She made no mention of coming back to town, at all.”

“She is at Templecombe, I suppose?” he continued, as he handed me his card, at last.

Our eyes met. I saw a faint, sudden

colour leap into his face. He, too, looked changed, and ill, and haggard; but I had no pity for him. It seemed to me cowardly and unmanly to persecute a woman in her weakness and misery—a woman unprotected and alone as Miss Kate was now.

"Yes, sir," I said, even more coldly.

"Thank you, Jane," he said, and then turned and walked slowly down the street. I watched him, noting how all the life and spring seemed to have gone out of his step—remembering, too, how different he had looked that first evening I had ever answered the door to him, standing on the steps of Mrs. Cray's house, with his over-coat thrown over his arm. What a queer, up-and-down sort of thing life is!

I went back to my own room wondering what he would do: whether he would go to Templecombe, or write to Miss Kate there? I was sure he intended to do one or the other, by the look in his face.

About a week later, I had a letter from Miss Kate, saying that the housekeeper at Templecombe had been taken very ill, and she wished me to come down there, and was sending up another of the servants, in my place, to Grosvenor Street.

I, therefore, packed up and left town the same day.

I bought some newspapers and periodicals at the bookstall of the railway-station, in order to beguile the hours of the long journey, and after the train had fairly started on its way, and I had studied the appearance of my travelling companions, I settled myself comfortably on the seat and opened one of the papers.

I had read most of its contents, when my eyes rested on a paragraph which had not yet attracted my notice, though I had glanced over it once or twice:

"Terrible collision in the Bay of Biscay.—Loss of the steamship 'Florida'."

I started, and cried out, so that my companions turned round to look at me.

The "Florida" was the steamer in which Mr. Carruthers had sailed. From the account, it appeared that a large American vessel had run into her at night, and she had sunk immediately. Every one of the passengers had perished, asleep in their berths; one or two of the sailors, alone, had escaped by springing on the deck of the destroying vessel.

It was one of those casualties of which we read, again and again, with a thrill of horror and of pity; but forget soon enough if we are unconcerned in the catastrophe.

I had read, often enough, of shipwrecks and fires at sea, and collisions, and such like accidents; but when I read the name of the doomed vessel, and knew that it held one human being associated with my own life and experience, the full horror and shock of it seemed to stand out in very different colours.

Did Miss Kate know? What would the news be to her? I asked myself. Sorrow, or regret, or relief?

No need now for penance, and torture, and self-repression. She was free to please herself; to follow her own instincts; to give the rein to all the pent-up feelings of her passionate, impulsive nature.

I read no more. I was in a fever of impatience to reach my journey's end. Never had the hours seemed so long, the miles so many.

It was almost dark when I reached Templecombe. I sprang from the carriage and hurried into the hall. One look at the footman's face told me the news was known.

"My mistress wishes to see you at once," he said.

"How is she?" I asked, eagerly. "How does she bear it?"

"No one has seen her since she heard the sad news," the man answered. "She shut herself up, alone, in her boudoir, and has been there all day."

I walked upstairs and went straight to the well-remembered room, and knocked at the door.

"It is I, Miss Kate," I said, in answer to the faint, low query that reached me.

The door was flung open. In the dusk of the room I saw the well-known little figure; I caught one glimpse of a white, uplifted face, and eyes swollen and red with passionate weeping. Then—she was in my arms, sobbing like a child.

"Oh, Jane!" she cried. "Oh, dear old Jane. Thank Heaven you have come! Oh, tell me, is it a judgement, do you think? Is Heaven going to punish me for my wickedness? Oh! my poor, good, faithful John—"

Is there any understanding the ways of women?

Time passed on, and Miss Kate grew very grave and quiet. The news was authenticated at the shipping-office, and Mr. Carruthers's lawyer came down to Templecombe, and told her the contents of the will, and arranged all matters of business for her.

She kept the boys at home, and had a tutor for them, and it seemed to me that she had settled down into quiet content once more. She never mentioned the name of Mr. Tresyllion for three months after she had heard of her husband's death; but, one day, as I was in the boudoir taking some orders about the servants' hall from her, a letter and a card were brought in by the footman, who handed them to her. I saw her face turn rosy red, then she laid the card down, and went over to the window and read the letter.

I knew perfectly well who had written it. I waited quietly until she had finished. Presently she turned to me with a sort of appeal in her look and gesture.

"It is from him," she said, quietly. "He is staying at the village. He wants to know if I will receive him?"

"Yes?" I said, interrogatively.

"Oh, Jane!" she burst out in the old impetuous way, "why should I play the hypocrite? What is the use of pretending to you? Here—read this—say what you think I ought to do. You know the whole story—advise me, now."

I took the letter from her hand. It was not very long, and it began without any ceremony of address:

"I can keep silence no longer. I have respected your grief, and effaced myself, so that you should not think me intrusive; but these three months have seemed an eternity to me. The longing for one sight of your face, one touch of your hand, is becoming intolerable. Surely, you must know what I feel. Surely you cannot have forgotten the words I spoke to you last season? Why should we play the hypocrite to each other any longer? Have we not suffered and struggled enough? You took all that made life for me away with yourself last June. I don't ask for anything, yet, at your hands. Only that I may see you sometimes. Send a line—Yes or No—to the inn here, where I am staying at present. Always yours,

"REX TRESYLLION."

Her eyes—eager, humid, brilliant—rested on my face as I gave the letter back to her again.

"I think, Miss Kate," I said, "that it is rather—soon; but, after all, we know what is bound to happen, sooner or later. You may as well give him permission to call."

How lovely she looked, as the colour softly flushed her cheeks, and her eyes

fell in sudden shyness. I thought, if he had seen her then—

"It seems a long time since June," she said. "I—I cannot help being glad that he has not forgotten."

"Did you think that likely?" I asked.

"Sometimes I have thought it," she answered, slowly, and looking at the letter in her hands, with a soft tenderness in her eyes that was infinitely touching. "I hope it is not wicked to be glad that I may think of him now. I did suffer terribly, Jane, terribly. More than you or any human being can guess or imagine."

"My dear," I said, "I am not blaming you. We do not have many chances of happiness in this world—it is as well to take them when we can."

"Then I may write and tell him to call?" she said, appealingly—just, for all the world, as if she were a little child again, and I had the charge and control of her actions.

I laughed.

"Of course, Miss Kate," I said. "Only I should not let him stay on here, if I were you. You will have all the country round talking—and it is as well to be discreet. You are both young, after all; and a year's waiting won't harm either of you."

"No," she said. "I hope, Jane, you don't fancy I am thinking of marrying again in such indecent haste. Oh, no, no! I shall be perfectly content, now that I know he is true, and really cares, and that there is no wrong in my thinking of him. I don't ask or wish for more. I only wonder how I could ever have been foolish enough to think my life complete without—love."

She wrote her note, and I took it downstairs, and sent one of the servants to the inn with it, and that same evening Mr. Tresyllion came to call; so he did not waste much time.

I never saw anything like the radiance and loveliness of Miss Kate's face that night, when I went to her room in answer to the message brought by her maid.

"I had to send for you, Jane," she said. "I am too happy to keep silent, and I am afraid of betraying myself to the staid, sedate old domestics here. Oh, Jane! have I ever, ever lived before? I don't believe it. I am in love with life—with the whole world. I could sing like the birds at daybreak. There isn't room in my heart for half my joy. It is too much. I am too happy; and yet I wouldn't have

a hair's breadth less! How he loves me—how he has always loved me—even when he seemed false. But he never was, Jane! Not really—not in his heart. It has been always, always me—even from the first hour we met—never any other woman."

"That," I said, ungraciously, "is just what every man tells every woman, when he makes love to her."

"You are a sour, cross old thing," she said, laughing. "But I am too happy to listen to you. Happy! why it was worth all the pain, the doubt, the struggles, the torture of these two years, only to feel that thrill of heart as his hands touched mine; only to see that look in his eyes as they met my own; only to hear his voice tremble for very weight of feeling, as he spoke my name at last, with the right of love, and not—the fear of shame!"

She sank down, suddenly, on her knees and buried her face in the soft coverlet.

"Oh," she sobbed, brokenly, "I hope I am not wicked to love him so—to be glad because he loves me. I was a good wife to John. I did make him happy. He always told me that—always. And I've not forgotten him. I won't be a worse mother to his boys—because—because of this new tie. I think it is the relief that makes me so glad. The lifting of that awful, awful weight. And I am not going to marry in any haste, Jane. Not for two years, at least—if he will only let me wait—for, now I know he loves me and is true, nothing else seems to matter. I should be perfectly content, even if we were parted. I am so sure of him—so sure of myself."

And I thought, as I saw her kneeling there, with face upraised, and tear-dimmed eyes, and clasped hands pressed against her throbbing heart, that I never should see again on any human face the pure, and passionate, and utterly ecstatic happiness that shone through hers on that night.

But a chill presentiment of evil crept into my heart as I looked down at that lovely, radiant face. It seemed to say that she was too happy; that life had given her too much. Alas! alas! how soon, how fatally soon, I was to find that presentiment verified!

CHAPTER XXIV.

"LOVE FOUND—GAINED . . ."

MR TRESYLLION stayed a week at the inn, and then went back to town.

He was quite right, I thought. It was

early days for the young widow to be receiving gentlemen visitors. And I knew what a country place was like, and how every one knew every one else's business better than their own, and that the smallest action becomes food for gossip. Miss Kate was not likely to escape. She was too pretty, too independent, too thoroughly indifferent to general opinion, and had never therefore been quite popular. The county magnates did not like the supreme contempt she showed for their opinions and prejudices, and the manner in which she rode, drove, walked, and visited just how and where she pleased. Then she was so young, such a girl in every way, and as likely as not to be romping with her boys in the garden when a carriage rolled up the avenue, instead of sitting in state in the drawing-room to receive visitors.

So I was glad Mr. Tresyllion was not bent on staying there to give occasion for more talk than usually abounded.

It is an odd thing that we spend so much of our lives in trying to avoid giving occasion for scandal—wondering what other people think and say of us, and yet neither the better nor the worse for their opinions, if we knew the real truth.

Miss Kate heard from her lover every day, and, I believe, answered him as frequently. She was not so restless and impetuous as she used to be. A sweet, contented happiness enfolded her, and there was no bitter mixed with the sweet now. Her nature seemed to unfold daily, and grow richer, fuller, deeper, more loveable in its absolute content with life.

To see her face when a letter from him arrived, was a study. The shy, sweet droop of eyelids over the betraying eyes; the soft blush; the happy little smile. And all day she would flit from place to place like a sunbeam, a snatch of some tender love-song falling from her lips, or a sigh of deep and pure content stirring the close and dusky folds of her morning-gown.

"He writes the most perfect letters, Jane," she would say to me.

"No doubt," I would answer. "If a poet who is a lover can't write good love-letters, I wonder who in the world can!"

Well, no need to dwell on this part of my story. Three months more passed, and the quiet content began to give place to a certain restlessness—and I was not at all surprised—when one day she asked me if I would go up to town with her. She

had business to attend to, and some necessary shopping, so she said, with a little conscious blush.

Of course I agreed, and we went off one morning, and in due time arrived at Grosvenor Street, where two rooms had been prepared for her according to her orders. Part of the house was still shut up; and she refused to have it opened, as she did not wish any of her fashionable friends to know she was in town.

She had left her maid behind her at Templecombe. There was only an old servant to cook and see to the house—and myself.

"I shan't stay more than three or four days," she said, the first evening we arrived, as I brought her some tea into the little library downstairs, where she had elected to sit and have her meals.

Just then the front-door bell rang; and I answered it, smiling to myself at the transparency of lovers' excuses.

Of course, it was Mr. Tresyllion. I showed him into the library, and went downstairs to the kitchen for another cup and saucer. Perhaps I sighed a little enviously, thinking of the rapture that meeting upstairs held. I gave them five minutes before returning with the cup. How happy they looked! and what a handsome pair they made! She so small and dainty, with her flushed cheeks, and big, soft eyes that fairly danced with happiness, and the dusky crown of her hair, catching all lights and shades from fire and lamp; and he handsomer than ever, I thought, with a proud and radiant look upon his face, and such a world of tender love in his eyes that the blindest person might have read his secret—yes, and envied it.

He remained all the evening; and looking at Miss Kate afterwards, I began to wonder how elastic a space of time the proposed four days would be. It is never easy to cut short one's delight with one's own hand.

Of course she stayed on, and week followed week, and still they could not tear themselves apart. Their love was the most absolute and perfect intoxication; and every day only seemed to ripen and intensify it.

There was the most complete and perfect sympathy between them—that entire magnetism of soul, sense, and nature which is so rare; but which, wherever it does exist, exceeds all other feelings. Never one hour of weariness, never a shadow on

either face, never anything but the tenderest comprehension, the most perfect companionship, the sweetness of welcome, the regret of parting.

I had read of such love in books. I had never imagined it could exist. But there was no doubt it did in this case. Not that Miss Kate was always the same, or less a "Lady of Moods" than her lover had called her in the old days that had seemed so hopeless and despairing.

Her variability was still her great charm; but it was sobered now by the depth and force of a feeling to which her nature had hitherto been a stranger.

"He actually seems to think I don't love him, Jane," she said to me one night as she sat before the mirror with her loosened hair about her, and her eyes looking back at her own reflection. "Not love him; fancy that! Ah! it is only because I love him too much; because I am afraid to let him see into the full depths of my heart, that I can deceive him so. Love him—as if that half expresses what he is to me! There seems to me no word that can say it; no song that could thrill with it; nothing in music, or speech, that can in any way convey the feelings of my heart now!"

She bent her head on her hands, and the veiling hair fell round her like a cloud. A little sob broke from her, startling and saddening to hear, as the outcome of those passionate words.

"It is too much," she cried, wildly. "I can't bear it—sometimes. It seems wicked, mad, idolatrous to care so intensely for one faulty human being. For I don't deceive myself, Jane. He is very far from perfect; but then, who am I to cavil at faults? Heaven knows I have my share, and more than my share; but when I think of him, when I look at him, when I hear his voice, when his arms hold me, it is just as if my heart's ecstasy would kill me from sheer excess of joy, and pain, and delight, and fear, all mingled and all one!"

"In that case," I said, in my most matter-of-fact manner, "I can only give you one piece of advice; get married as soon as ever your year of mourning has expired, and go abroad and live there for a while. Believe me, Miss Kate, there's nothing like a good sober dose of matrimony for curing romance, and you are making a hero and an idol out of a mere man after all. Handsome, I grant you—and clever, too—but only a man, Miss Kate; and a man is always capable of

inflicting the greatest amount of suffering upon the woman who loves him as you love Mr. Tresyllion."

"Yes," she said, slowly, "I often think I love him too much. It is unwise—almost, I fear, unwomanly—but you remember, Jane, what I once told you about 'letting myself go.' I fear I have done that at last. It seems as if I asked and desired nothing more of life now. But I am afraid; afraid of him, of myself, of my own happiness, of even the shadow of this coming separation. And he—he is always trying now to——"

She stopped abruptly. Her face grew scarlet as she lifted it and shook back the dark cloud of her hair.

"Oh, I never meant to say it," she panted. "Jane, why do you lead me on to speak of him?"

"Shall I finish the sentence, Miss Kate?" I asked. "It doesn't need any great cleverness—to marry him, and at once, I suppose. Well—why not?"

"Oh, Jane—I couldn't, I couldn't. It would seem so wrong, so forgetful, so—so hateful of us to do such a thing."

"You have both begun to think of it," I said, drily. "That is the first step. It is surprising how soon all the arguments will be 'for' instead of 'against.'"

"Oh no," she said, with sudden resolution. "They must be always 'against.' I am going away because I am afraid of listening—afraid of his entreaties and persuasions."

"You might marry him privately," I said.

"Are you a witch?" she cried, angrily. "Do you guess—do you know what he has been saying—every day of this last week?"

"I know you are both madly in love. It doesn't need much witchcraft to see that," I answered, "and I know what men are, as a rule. Mr. Tresyllion is young, passionate, adoring. He naturally finds every week a month, and every month a year, especially if you continue to keep him in a state of uncertainty about your own feelings."

"He will know them," she said, "some day—some day, when there will be no need of disguise or pretence. After all, Jane, he deserves a little punishment for his bad

treatment of me in the past. I am still jealous of that woman."

"Oh, my dear," I said, "no man is perfect, and very, very few are faithful. Believe that, and you will save yourself a deal of misery."

"Cruel, hard old Jane," she said, lifting her sweet eyes to my face. "But you can't make me doubt him now. I am too sure, and too happy. Oh, Jane, Jane," and she blushed suddenly over face and neck, "what a tale his eyes tell; just as he said to-night:

What's the earth,
With all its art, verse, music, worth,
Compared with love—found, gained, and kept."

"Poetry," I said, "is all very fine; but real life says different. The love may be found and gained; but I doubt its being 'kept' for very long. One or other wearies—cools—forgets. Ah! my dear, I've seen so much of it—so much of it."

"Yes," she said, wistfully, "I can believe you have, Jane. But our love is going to be an exception. It has endured a pretty harsh ordeal. It has stood a severe test. For myself I know I am sure. There is not the faintest doubt plucking at my heart. I love him, Jane—heart, soul, sense, spirit. He is all and everything to me—my very, very life. To lose him now would be worse than death; a million times worse!"

"How can you love him so, and yet leave him in doubt as to your feelings?" I asked wonderingly.

"I wonder myself," she said. "But perhaps the very depth and strength of my love prevents my showing it. I am so still, so quiet, that he thinks me cold. Well," and she rose and shook back her hair, laughing the low, happy laughter of content, "well, Jane, he will know all in good time. Ah, it will be a 'good time,' as I used to say when I was a child. No memory to poison our kisses; no doubt to chill; no foreboding to part us any more. I often wonder if Heaven will let us be so happy. For you know, Jane, all the famous love histories of the world are unhappy, and have tragic endings."

But I laughed and cheered her, and smiles soon replaced the tears that were threatening to fall.

THE EXTRA

SPRING NUMBER

OF

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

CONDUCTED BY CHARLES DICKENS.

PRICE
6d.

1889.

PRICE
6d.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE		PAGE
A KNOT IN A HANDKERCHIEF	1	A MAGIC INHERITANCE	31
THE LAST TRANSFORMATION SCENE OF THE SEASON	10	WITH THE REGIMENT	39
MARGUERITES, MARGUERITES	18	TWO AND ONE	47
SYBIL GRANT'S ROMANCE	22	AN ANGEL IN RED	53
PRIMROSE AND VIOLET. A POEM	31		

A KNOT IN A HANDKERCHIEF.

By "RITA."

CHAPTER I. THE KNOT.

SHE was very, very pretty—but it was not that. She had a bunch of daffodils fastened carelessly at the throat of her brown plush coat—a reminder of spring and of the season when our Laureate informs us "a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love"—but it was not that. No. I distinctly repeat that neither the fair face, nor the brown eyes, nor the daffodils had anything to do with it. It was simply that, sitting opposite to her in that useful if not most aristocratic of vehicles, the "'bus," I observed that suddenly she drew out from her pocket a dainty scrap of cambric, which I suppose she would have termed a handkerchief, and proceeded, calmly and deliberately, to tie a knot in it.

Now I am not more curious than the generality of my sex; but, at the time of which I write, I had a way of studying my fellow man—and woman—in and out of omnibuses, for many reasons. I affected omnibuses as a means of locomotion, though I should have preferred a carriage and pair, or a private hansom, had I had the option of choice. That being denied me by the cruelty of Fate, I generally travelled Strandwards once or twice a day in the useful and inexpensive "'bus," and for an hour, at least, that journey afforded me a fund of rich conjecture, and sometimes not a little amusement.

When I saw people dashing by in hansoms, victorias, buggies, and broughams, I said to myself, compassionately, "How much they miss!" They could not make acquaintance with the varied types of beings with whom I enjoyed speculative acquaintance—in omnibuses—and thereby must have lost one of the pleasures of life.

No. I could really almost afford to pity them when I considered the amount of amusement—not to say interest—I had derived from my omnibus acquaintances! What could my friends of the private hansom and the snug brougham know of the dear old lady, who invariably "tumbles" into her "'bus," and falls into the arms of her fellow passengers with a blissful indifference as to their capacity for supporting or assisting her to a seat; or of the helpless female who always has an umbrella, and always holds it in her arms in such a fashion that the handle and the point make alternate stabs at the faces and eyes of the passengers, and who never seems to have acquired the art of producing balance, by seizing the top rail, but just flops from side to side with feeble smile and useless apologies till some one fixes her in a seat? Then there is the austere maiden, with smileless lips and stern eyes, who surveys her fellow-passengers as one who should say, "Don't attempt your frivolous remarks on weather or 'limited accommodation,' to me;" who knows where she is going, and the exact fare, and pounces severely on the conductor if he should make a mistake in the change for a shilling. And the fidgety old lady who per-

sistently shouts out her destination, and jumps up excitedly at every stoppage thinking she has reached it. And the lady of uncertain age, who prods the conductor with her umbrella at all times and seasons, and offers her fare long before it is due, by way of complicating his calculations, and unburthening her own mind and purse. And the irate old gentleman, who always has a grievance and is always going to write to "the secretary and complain of incivility," as the notice of the company kindly suggests. Then there is the troublesome child, whose boots have such a charming faculty of acquainting themselves with the dresses, and coats, and shins on either side of "it." I say "it," because I agree with certain rules of German grammar which ascribe the neuter gender to those sweet beings, until they have gained sense or knowledge sufficient to endow them with the privilege of sex. And then there is the fat passenger, who never has room enough, but declines to take the hint that payment for the double space, occupied so tranquilly, might suit the relative convenience of "the squasher" and "the squashee." And the thin passenger, who drifts to the roomiest side—as naturally as the fat passenger to the most crowded—perhaps on the principle of "Like to like." And the knowing passenger, and the ignorant passenger, who has not the vaguest idea that the Temple does not lie in the direction of an omnibus steadily proceeding to Kilburn, or Brompton, and yet never thinks of asking the question till nearly at her journey's end. And the talkative passenger, and the gloomy and sternly silent passenger, who seems to consider a remark as a personal affront; and the passenger who never can find her purse, and persists in standing on the steps searching for it, and wildly clutching at the air when the 'bus moves on, and is only saved by a special Providence, or—the conductor, from an ignominious contact with the muddy street, or the inviting pavement. These, and many other curious beings, are the types of omnibus frequenters; and I, being by nature and profession a student of human nature, had found them an endless source of interest and speculation as I journeyed to or from the editor's "den" where I worked, and the modest lodging I inhabited. But never before had I seen any of that sex, whose idiosyncrasies specially delighted me, do such a thing as my opposite neighbour had done, namely, tie a knot in her handkerchief.

I looked at her. I looked at the knot as she replaced the wisp of filmy cambric in her dainty little muff; for, despite sunshine and soft winds and daffodils, no wise or sensible person, who had lived for any length of time in England, would have dreamt of believing the promise of that spring day.

I didn't believe it, though I had left my overcoat at home. But then it was shabby, and the sunshine was very bright. I had also corrected my imprudence by taking an umbrella with me. It was a very smart umbrella, and I am not betraying confidence when I say it was not mine, but the property of a friend to whom I was going to return it on my way home, provided it did not rain. Well, as I have already said, I looked at the knot and at the maker of the knot, and puzzled as to why and wherefore she had made it, and found that the progress of speculation acquainted me with various facts which perhaps had very little to do with that knot, but which still were—interesting.

For instance there were her eyes—brown, soft, velvety—full of unknown possibilities. Eyes which looked as if dreams of the "to be" had filled with the mists of their own fancies those sweet, soft depths. And her hair, brown also, but catching glints of sunshine in its meshes, and framing in the white, smooth brow, and faintly tinted cheek, with just the needful tone of colour they required. And her lips, charming in repose, arched and pouting, and with faint suggestions of dimples on either side, and which one felt sure would look equally charming if parted in speech or laughter.

But of course all this had nothing to do with my interest in the girl herself. No; as I said before, and as I distinctly repeat again, it was simply and entirely that knot in the handkerchief.

There were not many people in the omnibus that morning; and one by one they dropped, or jumped, or stumbled out, until at last only she and I were left. She and I—and the knot.

Oh, how I longed to ask its meaning! How I wished that I had been born without curiosity! How I wondered whether audacity or accident would befriend me so far as to put some question or remark into a deferential form of address, and thereby lead up gently to the subject on which I was speculating!

I grew hot and cold with dread and suspense. Every glance at the conductor

seemed to convey the ominous command, "stop." Every movement of the daintily-gloved hand threatened the production of a purse and the threepence. Hers at present was a threepenny fare—I had calculated that. So was mine. I thought what a sweet and mysterious sympathy must have brought us to share the same conveyance and the same fare. I also thought how well yellow daffodils looked against brown plush, and that if Fate had been kind enough to grant me a sister, I should have chosen just such a type of maiden sweetness and purity, and—well—beauty, as was the knoter of that handkerchief. I thought—well, a great many things which I am not bound to confess; but most of all I thought of that knot, and why it had been made.

We were in the most crowded part of the Strand, and our equipage was dashing merrily along, when suddenly there came a fearful crash—a jerk that threw my fellow-passenger into my arms, to the serious detriment of her hat, and the daffodils.

It was a not unusual catastrophe; the omnibus had come into collision with another omnibus, and the wheels seemed to have got hopelessly intermixed. There was much swearing and vociferating, and jerking of the unwieldy vehicle, and confusion of voices, and a brief dialogue with a policeman, and then we got off again.

But the accident had broken the ice; and my pretty companion and I exchanged a few words relative to the carelessness of omnibus-drivers before she got out.

For she did get out at Wellington Street, and I sighed as I watched the graceful figure disappear, and wondered if I should ever see it again. Strange to say, the accident had completely driven out of my head the knot in the handkerchief. I, in turn, reached my destination, and stopped the conductor, and rose from my seat. As I moved to the door I saw something white lying just where my foot had been. I stooped and picked it up, and thrust it into the breast of my coat. It was her handkerchief—the handkerchief with the knot that had been puzzling me so long. It must have fallen from her muff when the omnibus collision took place. I had not the vaguest idea what made me snatch it up as if it belonged to me. I suppose I ought to have given it to the conductor; but if that was a more honest proceeding than appropriating it myself, I agree with the Jew, who observed, of what the proverb

terms "the best policy," that no doubt it might be the best, but he thanked Heaven he had always been able to do without it.

In this special instance I found myself quite able to "do without it;" and the little handkerchief, with its delicate suggestion of perfume, and its feminine puzzling knot, lay near my heart all day, and kept me in constant remembrance of the pretty owner.

Should I ever see her again? Would she miss the handkerchief? Would the loss of that mysterious knot in any way affect her actions? For little things become sometimes powerful levers to Fate.

I am afraid I thought of her a great deal, despite work and the bother and fuss of publishing day, for I was sub-editor on the staff of a popular journal, which modesty forbids me to name here. Literature was, indeed, my forte, or I imagined it so to be. I had published three novels, written sundry farces and plays, and done a great deal of miscellaneous work that served to pad magazines and society papers. I was a long way off making my fortune, though, and was seriously thinking of emigrating to that new El Dorado—the Cape—where gold mines and diamond fields seem to be as common as black-beetles in a lodging-house kitchen, when I met the fair owner of the handkerchief.

All that day my thoughts seemed obstinately bent on the desirability of attaining wealth; of having a house of one's own; of the joys of domesticity, as opposed to bachelorhood; of a fair face to smile welcome and greeting after the day's labours were ended; of—well, really I cannot write half of the wild thoughts and fancies that flitted through my brain.

I had never been in so strange and foolish a mood since my "calf days;" never felt my mind swaying to and fro so persistently over a field of romantic possibilities, conjured up by a fair face, a pair of soft eyes, the smile of sweet, serious lips. But again I repeated to myself that in this instance it was not the face, or the eyes, or the girl herself; it was only, and simply, and entirely that she had chosen to puzzle me into conjectures about that knot in her handkerchief.

Work was over at last, and I was free to leave office, and papers, and all the worries attendant on them behind, and to stroll home in the sweet, cool evening, in as leisurely a fashion as I wished. The spring day had kept its promise: the sky was clear above the dingy buildings and

crowded thoroughfares; the air mild and sweet as the violets, and primroses, and daffodils, which everywhere brightened the street corners from flower-girls' baskets or market trucks.

Poets always speak of spring as if it was a joyous time, and to be taken joyously. Maybe that is possible when one is very young, or very happy. I only know that to me the voice of spring is full of yearning and regret, of sad and tender memories that made my vanished youth bright and hopeful as itself—but, unlike itself, fulfilled no single promise.

Perhaps never had I felt that yearning, and sadness, and regret, so strongly as on this morning of which I write, nor the longing for one other soul in sympathy with mine; one other life to share with me its dreams and visions, its joys and sorrows; one strong, firm hand-clasp of friend or love on the shifting sands of time; and never before had I known the longing die out in a passion of wild regrets and futile rebellion, that to a woman would have meant tears, to me, alas! only the old, weary burden of endurance for endurance' sake.

CHAPTER II. THE REASON OF THE KNOT.

I WAS almost at my own door, when suddenly my eyes fell on something in my hand—the umbrella! I had promised to return it that evening, and the sight of it recalled the promise, and induced me to turn my footsteps in the direction of Piccadilly, where lived its owner—the one individual among my numerous acquaintances who really stood to me in the light of that much-abused word, "friend."

Launcelot Crampton and I had been college chums together, and though fortune had favoured him, and deserted me, we had always kept up the intimacy and companionship begun in our youth. He was younger than myself, and possessed of independent means. However, that fact did not prevent him from utilising talents of no mean order. His artistic tastes had led him to follow painting as a profession; and as success is sure to befriend the fortunate, who do not actually need it, he had the satisfaction of becoming popular, and of being largely sought after as a portrait-painter, by reason of one picture which he had exhibited three seasons before that spring-time of which I write.

His rooms were in a street leading out

of Piccadilly, with a studio at the top of the house. I was admitted, and found him in the studio, lazily stretched on a divan, and smoking Turkish cigarettes, while he contemplated a half-finished picture on the easel before him. He raised himself on one arm as I entered, and greeted me with his usual bright smile of welcome.

"Quite a stranger, old man," he said. "What have you been doing with yourself? You've not been here for a good three weeks."

I shook hands, and gravely deposited the borrowed umbrella on a chair.

"You see," I remarked, "I have not forgotten to bring back your property."

"Yes," he said, "I see. Banks told me you had borrowed it the other day. Why wouldn't you come in?"

"I heard you had a sitter. I didn't like to intrude."

"Ah, yes," he said, his face brightening into a smile of pleasure and satisfaction, "so I had. There's the portrait. What do you think of it?"

I turned and glanced at the easel. To say I started, is to say very little. There, facing me, was the sweet girl-face, the brown, velvety eyes, the hair half dusk, half gold, of my friend of the handkerchief.

"What is it? Do you know her?" asked Launcelot. "I dare say you do, though. Perhaps you've seen her act—May Dering, you know; she's in that piece at the V—Theatre. She's absolutely charming. That's going up to the Academy," he added. "But there's a good month's work in it yet."

I said nothing, only stood and gazed at the portrait—a half-length figure; the dress of dead white satin, a cloak of faint sea-green plush, lined with exquisitely-tinted silk of the palest coral, just falling from the graceful shoulders.

How lovely she was—how lovely! And now I knew her—an actress, and one already celebrated for her grace, and beauty, and talent. One of the few actresses who was a lady, and could play a lady on the stage as in a modern drawing-room, without affectation, without vulgarity, without that drawback to most modern acting—burlesque of the part played.

May Dering—I had seen her act, but at too great a distance to recognise the face that morning in the omnibus. But now how it all came back to me! A dim room; the pathos and tragedy of a girl's face;

the tender, broken music of a voice that always went straight to the hearts of her audience.

"Well, are you ever going to speak," demanded Launcelot at last, "or has that portrait deprived you of your senses? I don't wonder at it, for I'm quite gone on her myself. She's every bit as charming as she looks, and that's saying a good deal."

"Yes," I said, abstractedly, and then turned away with sudden resolution. "It's very odd," I continued, "how small the world seems, and how one is always knocking up against people quite unexpectedly."

"A propos of what is that philosophical remark?" enquired Launcelot, knocking the ash off his cigarette, and stretching himself out in an attitude of lazy contemplation of his work.

"A propos of Miss Dering," I said; and straightway related the omnibus incident.

He listened with apparent interest.

"Well, it is singular," he said. "And so you've got the handkerchief? Would you like to return it to her in person? I'll give you the chance if you wish."

"I should not—object," I said, cautiously, and trying—I hope with success—to make my face express nothing at all, and express it well.

"Well," laughed the lazy youth, surveying me from a vantage point of comfort, "I can manage it, for I'm going to an affair to-night where she is to be, and I can take you, if you like."

If I like! If parched ground likes rain. If burning desert loves shade. If the drooping flowers like the showers of summer. If—well, no need to continue in this strain. I could make but one answer conscientiously, and, being conscientious, I, of course, made it. I agreed to call for Launcelot at eleven o'clock, and proceed to the festive gathering where my divinity of the handkerchief was to appear; and after a little more desultory conversation, and a good deal of "chaff" on the part of Crampton, I left the studio, and took my way to my own modest "diggings."

I am not a social man, and I never particularly affect those entertainments called "At Homes," where the unfortunate male biped has to stand in corners or on a stairway for three or four mortal hours, catching occasional glimpses of a singer or reciter in the far distance—pinned in by arms and limbs of other suffering mortals—occasionally struggling for a tepid ice, or a glass of that

mildly poisonous beverage yclept "claret-cup," until the clock "strikes the hour of retiring;" and, with a sigh of relief, and a smile of forced politeness, you murmur over the hand of the equally martyred hostess, "Thanks for such a pleasant evening."

No; I hated parties of all sorts. My chief dissipation was a Bohemian supper with some three or four kindred souls, or a visit to the theatre. Yet now I was making one of a crowd, and a considerable crowd, too, among a set of people I did not know in the least, and certainly did not care a pin about—and for what? Only that I might restore a piece of property which I could perfectly well have left at Crampton's studio for its owner. Only that I might again look into the depths of those velvety brown orbs which, for the space of one spring day, had haunted me.

Well, I dare say men have ere this gone to parties and entertainments for reasons quite as ridiculous.

We had our names shouted up the staircase, and I bowed to a stout, matronly person in ruby velvet and diamonds, who I believe was the hostess, but whose name I don't know to this day. Needless to say I had not come to see her.

Launcelot and I succeeded after a time in getting into the reception-rooms, which were very full, and where music was going on as an aid to conversation.

My friend seemed to know every one; but I felt rather "out of it," to use a slang but expressive term. I glanced about with idle curiosity. I listened to scraps and ends of conversation with that vague indifference born of boredom, which represents a great deal of modern enjoyment—that is to say, if we may believe the tales in the smoking-room.

I saw many pretty women, many lovely toilettes, many interesting and celebrated persons elbowing their way through the well-bred crowd, exchanging greetings, breaking up into groups, and generally behaving according to the edicts of society. But I saw not the one fair face I wished to see, and was just anathematising my folly in coming to such a gathering, when Launcelot's voice at my elbow broke cheerfully on the gloomy meditations caused by his desertion.

On his arm was my charming acquaintance of the morning, looking far lovelier even than my dreams of her, far lovelier, so I thought, than the portrait on the easel—far lovelier because of the flush and smile of recognition that seemed

to break like sunlight over her face as Launcelot introduced me by name.

She held out her hand with the frankest, sweetest grace.

"You are not—quite—a stranger," she said, and the deep, sweet tones of her voice sounded to me as no strains of music, however beautiful, could have sounded.

I am usually accounted a very self-possessed man; but I don't know where my self-possession fled. If I looked as great a fool as I felt, I can afford to be sorry for myself as I felt the touch of that small, gloved hand, and looked back into the sweet and haunting eyes.

I stammered out a question as to the effects of the omnibus accident, and then, somehow, Launcelot drifted away, and my courage returned, and I managed to find her a seat and to plunge desperately into some sort of conversation in the hope of keeping her for a few moments to myself.

That handkerchief, that thrice-blessed handkerchief, came on the scene. I felt reluctant enough to part with it; but what could I do? Yet, as I gave it back, and saw the soft smile on her lips, a sort of desperate courage induced me to ask the question that had tormented my curious mind in the omnibus.

"I suppose," I said, boldly, "you will think me very impertinent if I tell you that I have been puzzling my brains all day to fathom the meaning of this—knot? When you made it this morning I was vainly endeavouring to conjecture a reason. I have seen handkerchiefs put to many uses, but I never saw one knotted like this before."

"Oh," she said, with a little soft laugh, as she took the cambric from my hand, "that is easily explained. Have you really never seen any one—any woman, of course—tie a knot in her handkerchief?"

"Never!" I affirmed stoutly. "Is it—usual?"

"I think so," she said, demurely. "It is done as a reminder. At least, so I have heard. You want to remember some special thing, and when you take out your handkerchief and see the knot, you think of it at once."

"How very ingenious!" I said. "Now, that would never have occurred to a man. He would either trust to memory or—a pocket-book. So that knot was to remind you of—something. Something you were afraid of forgetting?"

"Being an author," she said, "I suppose you are privileged to express curiosity, and

try to satisfy it. But it is an odd coincidence that this little knot, which has so puzzled you, has something to do with—yourself."

"With me?" I echoed, vaguely. "That sounds impossibly flattering."

"I do not mean it to be so," she said, gravely; "but it really is a little odd. I had this morning to see about some stage requisites, and I thought, as I was in the Strand, I would get that book of yours—'Story of a Life.' I had had it from the library; but I and my mother liked it so much that I thought I would buy it, as I was in the Strand this morning. The memory flashed into my mind as I sat in the omnibus, and, for fear of forgetting, as I had so many commissions, I made that knot. Was I not right when I said that it was a little—odd?"

"I—I suppose so," I said, stupidly. My thoughts were in a whirl—brown plush, daffodils, knots, collisions, all seemed mixed and mingled in a string of thronging memories. "It seems too good to believe."

"Why? There is nothing so very unnatural about the coincidence. Your books are popular, and deservedly so. I wish there were more of them, for my part—only three, and I have them all."

Was ever flattery so sweet? Was ever incense so potent? And yet I could only sit dumb and stupid there, and wonder if she really meant it; if she really cared for anything I had written, remembered any word I had said.

I looked at her, at the charming pose she had taken, at the sweet face, the pearly gleams of her satin gown. I had never felt so strangely and strongly attracted to any one before; and yet even as I acknowledged the attraction, the folly of it came home to me with that warning of common-sense we so often disregard.

"It is more than kind of you," I said, "to tell me so flattering a truth. To know that even one among a crowd of readers appreciates him, is an author's best payment."

"You ought to be receiving plenty of such payment, then," she said. "I think your books are widely read and universally liked. You write a little too much above the head of ordinary folk to be exactly popular; but you surely call yourself successful?"

"No," I said, gloomily, "I do not; and I certainly can't make money."

"Oh, money!" she said, with a pretty pout of the charming lips. "Don't say

you write for that, or are sordid, or mercenary. It spoils all imagination, inspiration, romance."

"Maybe so," I said; "but it is absolutely necessary. I have failed to impress upon my tailor, or my bootmaker, or my tradespeople, that imagination and romance should be fostered by long credit, and never roughly disturbed by demands for the settlement of that obnoxious document, 'a little account.'"

She laughed.

"I suppose," she said, "that is true enough. How tiresome it is to want money, and to feel that for the mere want of it so much that is good and artistic has literally to go to the wall!"

"You," I said, gravely, "have never felt that need, I am sure. I hope you never will."

Our eyes met. I saw her face had grown sad and shadowed. In that glance, brief as it was, I seemed as if I had dreamt whole years away; yet only awoke, as a dreamer awakes, to find that I had forgotten everything, save that the dream had been very sweet.

"How little people really know of one another!" she said. "You mistake very much if you think I have never known trouble or poverty. It was that knowledge which drove me to the stage four years ago. It was that trouble——"

She broke off abruptly. Her face grew very pale; the bouquet of daffodils in her hand trembled.

"That—what?" I asked, involuntarily.

As I followed her glance, I saw it rest for a moment on a man leaning against the door-post at some distance from where we were seated. A short, coarse, middle-aged man, with a fat, white face and thick lips, and scanty fair hair. I did not know him; but I fancied my companion did, for the glance spoke recognition as well as dislike.

"I—I hardly know what I was going to say," she said, and her voice sounded to me tired and languid now. "Perhaps that poverty has made women commit greater crimes than men; has often, so sadly often, wrecked and spoilt the promise of womanhood with the cruelty of a relentless fate."

"Strange words," I said, involuntarily, "for such young lips."

"Oh," she said, passionately, "I am not young; I am not ignorant. Do not think that. Life has been always hard to me. I don't know whether it may not prove even harder—soon."

Again her eyes strayed to that coarse, uninteresting figure, and I could not restrain the impulse that bade me ask his name.

"Don't you know him?" she said. "That is Lord Vereker. He is one of the greatest patrons of the modern drama. No first night is complete without his presence; no piece successful till it has received the seal of his approval."

"Is he a friend of yours?" I asked, jealously.

She looked at me; then half rose from her seat.

"Take me down to the tea-room," she said, "and I will tell you. At present it is only necessary to say that it is at Lord Vereker's request your friend is painting my portrait, and that he—is to pay for it."

CHAPTER III.

"THE REGION OF—PROBABILITY."

"Now tell me," she said, when I had found her a seat in the tea-room and procured her what she desired, "about your books—about yourself. I have so often longed to meet you, and wondered what you were like, and——"

"A mistake," I said, as she paused. "All artists and authors ought to be known only through their works. They never—or at least very rarely—come up to the expectations formed by those works."

"Perhaps so," she said, sipping the tea and looking dreamily and speculatively at me from over the little cup. "But, all the same, one likes to have a flesh-and-blood acquaintance with them. Do you—I hope you won't think me inquisitive, but, remember, you are the first real author I have ever met—do you think when people write, they put themselves into their work? Perhaps I don't express it very clearly; but I have so often longed to know when anything has touched me, or—or come home to me as true, if the writer had felt it also? If it was experience, or sympathy, that made him say just the one thing that echoed my own feeling—brought the tears to my own eyes that surely must have been very near his own?"

"I understand what you mean," I said. "I can, of course, only answer from my own personal experience. I could not describe a situation if I did not also feel myself—temporarily—in that situation—suffering the pain, or suspense, or joy, or fear described."

"Ah," she said, eagerly, "that is just what I feel when acting. I am not myself. I am only the part I am playing. I forget everything—everything but that. I think," she added, rather mournfully, "that is the only time I am really happy."

"You like your profession, of course?" I said, as I took the cup from her hand and put it on the table beside us.

"Yes, dearly. Otherwise I could not follow it. I always think of a sentence I read somewhere, not very long ago: 'None can give more than is in them.' I think it is so true."

"Yes," I said, gravely, "it is. But I fancy plenty of people pretend to a great deal more than is 'in' them."

"Do you go much into society?" she asked, suddenly. "I have never met you anywhere before."

"I dare say not," I said, grimly. "I am not a social person at all, and go out very little. I only came here to-night——"

"Yes!" she said, as I broke off abruptly.

"To return your handkerchief."

She looked at me; her face seemed to have lost its brightness, and colour, and grown cold and worn.

"You might," she said, slowly, "have given it to Mr. Crampton."

"Yes," I agreed. "It is one of the remarkable things of life to look back on what one 'might have done,' and speculate on the results that would have followed."

"And you remembered me; you thought about me?" she went on dreamily, as she pulled the petals of the daffodils with nervous fingers.

"Yes; I did both. Do you wonder at it?"

"Very much. Because you seem so sensible—so—so different to most of the men I have met."

"Miss Dering," I said, "your flattery is very sweet; but don't you think it is also a little—dangerous?"

"No," she said, abruptly. "We have not been conventional at all. When I said you were sensible, I meant it. Surely, for once in a way, one may speak truth without fear of being misjudged."

"If it is truth," I said, "I am more than repaid for the pain you gave me a few moments ago. You were right when you said, we had not been conventional. Somehow, I feel as if I never could be—with you."

"But how," she asked, "did I pain you?"

"You will think me a great fool," I said.

"But did you mean anything—anything special—when you spoke of Lord Vereker?"

A slow, hot flush crept up to the delicate throat and face; her eyes remained cast down.

"If I said—yes?"

For just a second or two my heart felt the quick, sharp stab of an answered dread. Of course it must be that. He admired her; he wished to marry her. Could I blame him? Could I blame her? Had she not spoken of poverty, struggle, effort? She so fair, so young, so formed to charm, and attract, and delight! Why should she not accept the gifts of fortune when they were offered her? And yet when I looked at her fair young beauty and thought of him—that satyr with his pale, fat face, and sensual lips, and bloodshot eyes—a thrill of disgust ran through me.

Oh, why was I not rich? Why had I not gold mines and diamond mines, and—well, a few more of the good things of this world to throw at her feet? Why——

Her voice broke the spell of silence once more. "How absorbed you are! Of what are you thinking?"

I rose somewhat abruptly. "Miss Dering," I said, "I am not a lady's man, and not used to the ways of society, or, perhaps, I should succeed better in convincing you that I had no feelings of any sort whatever. As it is, I can only say that, if I interpret your words aright, and if, in your youth and beauty, you are about to sacrifice yourself as so many of your sex do to a marriage that has only the advantage of wealth and position, I—I am too honest to offer congratulations. I can only say I am—sorry—for you."

She looked up. The colour had left her face again. Her eyes were dim, and shadowed by regrets that might—or might not—be real. Heaven forbid I should attempt to say.

"You cannot be more sorry for me," she said, in a low, stifled voice, "than I am for myself."

I walked home that night under the clear, spring sky, railing against fate, against life, against the chance that had led me that morning to interest myself in so simple and senseless a thing as a knot in a woman's handkerchief. To think that so small a thing should have power to alter the whole quiet tenor of a man's life!

Only that morning we had been strangers. That morning; and now—should

I ever see a spring day dawn, or catch the colour of daffodils, without a vision of a fair girl's face, and two eyes, brown, sad, soft as velvet, looking back to me, and seeming in silent eloquence to echo what the lips murmured with so pathetic a hopelessness?

"You cannot be more sorry for me than I am for myself."

It was all so strange, so foolish, so inexplicable; but, nevertheless, it was all as true as the pain at my heart, and the ceaseless memory that haunted me. She would marry Lord Vereker for his money. She would leave the stage. She would never again seem to me the vision of pure and innocent maidenhood, with the light and glory of the spring-time in her dreaming eyes, that I had idealised into a living poem.

It was all over—a brief dream, a passing fancy—and I had it out with myself under the quiet stars as I paced to and fro the Embankment, instead of going home to bed in a rational and becoming manner. Whatever there had been of romance, and poetry, and passion in my calm and undemonstrative nature she had brought to life, as suddenly, as strangely as the spring buds open at the first warm touch of sunlight.

It was useless to say that I knew nothing of her; that she might be capricious, mercenary, illogical, vain; that even if she had been free, nothing could have come of our acquaintance! Quite, quite useless. If such sensible ideas could root out the illogical senselessness of a man's or woman's love-dream, how different life would be!

There was nothing for it but to fight the battle out with myself, and then bow to the inevitable. I should not be likely to see her again; and, after all, was there not always the world before me? What was to prevent me seeking change, excitement, fortune, where and when I pleased?

Before I went home in the chill freshness of the dawn, even as I lingered to gaze on the tints of the daffodil sky, my mind was made up. I would leave England, as I had so long talked of doing; new scenes, new life, hazard and enterprise would soon knock sorrow and dreams out of my head. Life for me henceforth should be less imaginative, and become a thing of prose and facts, and hard work, and labour. I would tell no one, not even Launcelot. But, all the same, I resolved that ere a week had passed over my head, I should

have shaken the dust of my native land from off my feet, and set sail for the new El Dorado, about which men were going mad from day to day!

If I were writing a fairy-tale, how easy it would be to describe the beneficent efforts of the genius of good fortune on my behalf; for I suppose it will seem rather like a fairy-tale to say that at the venerable age of thirty-five, and in less than twelve months' time from the date of my leaving England, I was returning there with a fortune such as my wildest dreams had never pictured as a possible possession, achieved by my own personal efforts, and won by an extraordinary run of luck.

Having won it, the craving to return to the old land became too strong to be resisted. I had received or sought no news of any one there since I had left it; but now, as the murky skies and murky seas heralded its near approach, a strange feeling of longing and regret came over me.

I thought of the old life; the drudgery of the editor's office; the Bohemian suppers; the discussions of work, and abuse of critics; the daily task of cudgelling one's brains for something that might at least appear novel; of Launcelot Crampton and his artistic tastes; of—of many things that most assuredly had nothing at all to do with one persistent, irritating little memory that would try and intrude itself, and was simply and entirely nothing more sensible or important than—a knot in a handkerchief.

"She is married long ago, of course," I said to myself, with a natural suggestion of a more irrevocable knot, tied, no doubt, by Bishops or Deans, or some such high dignitaries, long ere this.

Married long ago. Was that my sigh, or the faint breath of the air on my cheek? Strange that I had not yet forgotten; strange that twelve hard, toilsome months had not been able to wipe out the record of one brief spring day!

I was in London once more, gazing at familiar streets with that odd sense of unfamiliarity produced by absence and travel. In London, in the most luxurious of hotels, and enjoying the most luxuriously simple of repasts; in London, with the dear, friendly face of the "Times" before my own, and the columns of foreign, and home, and social, and political news inviting my erratic attention.

Why did I, after all these months, turn suddenly to the theatrical column; and why, among all theatres and all pieces produced or revived, did there suddenly start out and confront me the name of one piece, and of one actress?

Answer me, scoffers at fate; for, indeed, I cannot answer for myself.

Neither can I give any clear or coherent account of rushing off to such a theatre and securing a front stall, and of sitting dazed and breathless, waiting for the envious curtain to rise and assure me I had not dreamt. That May Dering was May Dering still, not Lady Vereker, not martyred and sold for money or money's worth. Still my brown-eyed divinity, with the pure, sweet face and tender smile that, Heaven knows, had haunted my memory long, and long enough!

She saw me, and, little vain as I am, that momentary falter of voice, that flash of surprise and welcome in the brown eyes spoke eloquently enough to mine.

How long it seemed till the piece was over; how much longer till the public had wearied of calling and recalling her; how much longer before she appeared at the stage-door, with a grim and elderly maiden as chaperon, and, seeing me, told the cab that waited for her to follow slowly for a few yards, and gave me the blessed privilege of walking thus beside her, and learning she was still free.

And then I begged permission to call on the morrow, and put her into the cab and held her small, soft hand for one exquisite moment. And as I took my own way back to the hotel, I knew I envied no man on the face of the whole wide earth, for my darling's brown eyes had spoken a truth too sweet to whisper in these pages—a truth I would have faced a hundred deaths to hear, but which I might live to ask and listen to, ere the sweet spring-time had passed again into the sadness of the young year's yesterday.

THE LAST TRANSFORMATION SCENE OF THE SEASON.

By C. L. PIRKIS.

THE Professor rose majestically from his chair.

"Don't talk to me about the guidance of your senses," he said, severely; "you should guide them, not they you. If

I had my way, I would halve the senses of nine-tenths of mankind, and then people would have more than they could manage. Five senses to feed one brain! In nine cases out of ten the brain is swamped, not fed by them. It is like giving a man a team to drive before he has learnt to manage a pair!"

I had jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire. In the earlier part of the evening I had convoyed a party, consisting of uncle, aunt, and country cousins, to the pantomime—the last performance of the season. Then I had crept away to enjoy a quiet cigarette over my evening paper before the conclusion of the performance compelled me to take my place as host at the head of the supper-table, and, lo, this terrible Professor had swooped down upon me, and, without any provocation on my part, had stepped into his professorial chair, and cigarette and evening paper together had had to make their obeisance to him.

This bevy of country relatives had been, if the phrase be allowed, hanging over my head for the past three years: ever since, in fact, tidings had reached my native village, in Wiltshire, that I was achieving fame and fortune for myself in London, as an electrician.

From that time, my relatives had appeared determined not to lose sight of me; and, from time to time, had revived my waning recollection of them by a series of characteristic presents.

I should add that a delicately-conveyed intimation, that not one of them had ever visited the metropolis or "seen the sights," had more than once accompanied their presents.

I kept my relatives at bay for nearly three years; then I succumbed. "Better take the draught at a gulp, and be done with it," I said to myself. So I hired a suite of rooms at "The Grand," and invited them one and all to be my guests in town for a week.

That was a hard-working week. I used to go to bed at nights more worn out than ever I had been in the early days of my office work. Not so my relatives. They showed themselves as impervious to fatigue as the wheels of the cabs which carried them through the London streets—I used to put them into cabs whenever it was possible, I found they attracted too much attention when allowed to go at large. I took a week's entire holiday on purpose to keep my eye on them; abandoned my rooms over my office, and took possession

of apartments adjoining theirs at the hotel. To tell the truth, I was rather afraid to trust them out of my sight, lest they might get into mischief; so, from morning till night, I danced attendance on their heels. On the first day after their arrival we did the National Gallery, Guildhall, St. Paul's, Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament, winding up with high tea and the theatre. From henceforth, high tea and the play afterwards grew to be an institution. Work as hard as we might all day at the sights, my relatives were always fresh and ready at night for the theatre-going.

An odd party we must have looked, as we skimmed crossings or hailed cabs in the intervals between underground railway travelling. Uncle Septimus in drab gaiters, with broad-brimmed hat pushed back from his forehead, as a rule headed our party. He was horribly near-sighted, and, being over fourteen stone in weight, I was in a constant tremor lest he might walk over somebody. Dick, aged seventeen, moon-faced and open-mouthed, straggled about anywhere—I told him to give himself up to the police if he were "lost." Ruth was so small and so quiet, I scarcely gave her a thought; she never seemed to get into anybody's way—that was her chief charm to my mind. I think Aunt Ju was, perhaps, the most embarrassing of the party. She had a trick of stopping in front of the chemists' shops to look at the drugs they had on view, and, if the survey were satisfactory, she would go inside, where, sometimes, she would be more embarrassing still. But Aunt Pen was unquestionably the most attractive.

"I made up my mind that your relatives shouldn't disgrace you among your smart London friends, Edmund," she said, as she stood in the middle of the big platform at Waterloo Station, "so I ransacked my wardrobe, and you see the result, my dear."

Yes, I saw the result, not a doubt, and so did other people. Twelve colours, I'm confident, came together in her toilette; and as for the cut of her garments—well, I could not have realised even Wiltshire milliners perpetrating such atrocities in the shape of bonnet and cloak, if I had not seen them.

Personally, I had no objection to her standing still in by-streets to look in at shop-windows, but I confess to having the very strongest objection to her habit of persistently backing off the kerb into the very middle of a crowded roadway

to get a view of a church-clock in order to set her watch. She was tall, and stout, and it generally took me and a policeman to bring her back. She would always mildly remonstrate with us both when safely landed on the pavement.

"Now, how am I to keep my watch exact to a minute, unless I regulate it daily?" she would say, standing still to say it. "If I were in Wiltshire, I should have the clock over the Squire's stables. But there's not one in all that big hotel to be depended on, and you know I keep you all true to a minute."

Yes, not a doubt she did. Whether her watch wound her up, or she wound up her watch, I never felt quite sure; but, certainly, it was thanks to her unflagging energy that the "lions of London" saw so much of me that week, and my personal friends so little.

There were two friends, however, who refused to have their claims set on one side by those of my relatives. Those two were a widow and her daughter, with whom of late I had grown to be on very intimate terms. Now, although the mother was styled plain Mrs. Jolliffe, the daughter was known as Mademoiselle Claire Léclair; this, for the all-sufficient reason that she was studying for the stage, and was shortly to make her début at a leading theatre.

Mademoiselle Claire was a beautiful girl. She had big blue eyes, a mountain of golden hair, and the pinkest and most delicate of complexions. She delighted in wonderful costumes of sea-green tint, and greatly affected black velvet Rubens hats, with ostrich-feathers a yard long. As might be imagined, she had many admirers, and in view of the brilliant professional career which no doubt lay before her, my masculine friends were in the habit of telling me that I was a lucky fellow to have made, beforehand, such progress in the young lady's favour.

Claire and I were on very easy, confidential terms; she would talk quite frankly to me of herself, and her hopes, and her prospects. She was not going on the stage for a living merely—"Oh no, but because she wished to enter her protest against the too prevalent idea that the theatrical profession was not one that a lady by birth and education could adopt." It may be remarked, in passing, that her mother's pronunciation of the English tongue occasionally left something to be desired, a fact for which Claire readily

enough accounted by the circumstance that Mrs. Jolliffe's parentage was semi-foreign, her mother having been Cingalese, and her father Irish. Be that as it may, Claire was my divinity in those days, and my offerings at her shrine made an item in my yearly income.

This, however, did not trouble me; my balance at my bankers' was good, and I considered myself amply repaid for any amount of lavish expenditure by the friendly little notes of thanks which, sometimes three or four times a week, the postman brought me, and by the pleasant little evenings which Claire and I—always with Mrs. Jolliffe as a decorous third—were wont to pass at a theatre or other public place of amusement.

Claire had a clever, sharp tongue, and a knack of hitting off people's peculiarities which was very diverting. I dare say, if her eyes had not been so soft and brilliant, and her mouth drawn into such pretty curves when she made her witty speeches, I might have detected a spice of ill-nature in them. As for instance, when she heard of the arrival of my country relatives, and begged that I would secure front seats in the dress-circle at the theatre on every possible occasion, so that she might get a good look at them from the stalls. And also, when after introduction to them at her own request, she whispered into my ear with her large eyes fixed full on little Ruth: "She looks like one of those gutta-percha toys one buys for babies, which are warranted to squeak, and which never do squeak."

As it was, however, all her speeches passed muster with me, and all her requests were law to me. And when, on the last day of my relatives' stay in town, she sent me one of her tiny notes, saying that she was dull and wanted diverting, and hoped that I would allow her and her mother to join the farewell supper, which she knew I was giving that night, I sent back immediately a delighted invitation, although I knew perfectly well what manner of diversion she expected the family party would afford.

As I sank into a comfortable chair beside the bright fire, which the coldest and most frost-biting of springs rendered a necessity, I found my thoughts running not on my warm-hearted, if somewhat eccentric, relatives, but simply on Claire, and Claire only. My evening paper lay unopened by my side, although I knew it contained the latest account of a colossal electric-car just

started in Philadelphia. I took out a pencil and note-book, and commenced making a close calculation of my yearly income—at what rate it was increasing, and whether its sum total warranted me in taking to myself so expensive a luxury in shape of a wife as Mademoiselle Claire.

"Electricity is the power of the day," I said to myself. "Those shares in the new company are bound to——" But at this moment a waiter entered the room, and informed me that a gentleman wished to see me. On the card which he presented was inscribed:

PROFESSOR OTTO VON BERGMANN,
Saint Neot's College,
Boston.

I knew what lay before me now. This Professor was a man well known in both hemispheres as a metaphysician, moral philosopher, psychologist, and I don't know what beside. He was German by birth, English by education, American by adoption, and held a chair at the Boston College, which had conferred on me an honorary degree for the impetus which I had given to the study of electricity in certain quarters.

I looked at the waiter and groaned. The appearance of that waiter is distinctly impressed on my memory from certain circumstances which followed. He was a small man, about four feet ten inches or so in height; at any rate, as he fronted me, his head was very little above mine as I sat. That head was crowned with the crispest and curliest of red hair, parted down the middle into two distinct wings. His features were nondescript, and I have forgotten them, but his height and his hair are stereotyped on my brain.

He saw my consternation.

"He's a quiet-looking gentleman, sir," he began, in a friendly tone.

And then he had to stand on one side and let the "quiet-looking gentleman" pass, for the Professor had followed his card upstairs to my room.

He was a tall, bony man, with a stoop—his head preceded his legs into the room by about a quarter of a yard; that head was not bald as so learned a Professor's ought to be, but was covered with straight, greyish hair; his nose was aquiline, his chin clean-shaven; his eyes I could not see, for they were hidden behind blue glasses. His voice was mellifluous, yes, I'll admit that, when he addressed me; my heart sank not at the manner, but at the matter of his speech.

He expressed his delight at shaking hands with a man with whom he had so many interests in common.

Those four last words struck a note of alarm. I bowed—slightly, not cordially—to express my appreciation at the implied compliment. I solemnly assert I did nothing else. Yet, before five minutes were over our heads, we were in the “very thick of it”; that is to say, he was delivering an animated oration on such light matters as perception, vision, incorporeity, with occasional side-glances at other equally frivolous topics, while I sat a mute and subjugated listener.

I tried what stolid taciturnity would do; he broke off blandly to inform me that my attention was most complimentary, and made him “warm to his subject.” Next I rang the bell, and ordered wine to be brought. He declined all refreshment; he then divided his subject into two parts, and went on more serenely than ever. I tried what a compliment would do; told him I heartily endorsed his views on subjective consciousness, and considered that he had expressed them in truly masterly fashion. Upon this he bowed most affably, said he had never enjoyed a conversation so much before, divided the second half of his subject into three parts, and proceeded to take them in their order.

Then I resigned myself to my fate, knowing that my experience of the moment had been that of many men before me.

I looked at the clock which faced me on a bracket against the wall; an hour and a half must elapse before I could hope to hear the country boots of my relatives, or Mademoiselle Claire’s light step mounting the stairs. I leaned back in my chair. “He’ll fill that hour and a half easily enough,” I said to myself; and fill it he did.

Towards the end of the second half-hour I grew horribly sleepy. I found myself beginning to sit very upright in my chair, blinking hard at the Professor.

If it had not been for that wretched drowsiness, I don’t think I should have been idiotic enough to attempt anything in the shape of the mildest of demurs to his views. As it was, what I did say escaped me unawares, and I had to take the consequences.

Floating dimly into my sleepy brain came the fag-end of one of his sentences. He was quoting his authorities—a long list of names of learned men who, he said,

were the “lights of the century,” and he bid me thank Heaven for their guidance; for, without them, thought and science would have come to a dead-lock.

I looked up at him with half-closed eyes, and said I dared say they were wonderful men, but I preferred to thank Heaven for the guidance of my senses.

Then it was that he had risen majestically from his chair, and had poured the vials of his wrath upon my head.

“The guidance of your senses,” he had repeated, severely. “If I had my way, I would halve the senses of nine-tenths of mankind, and then people would have more than they could manage. Five senses to feed one brain! It is like giving a man a team to drive before he has learnt to manage a pair.”

And then he took off his spectacles and looked at me.

I hadn’t seen his eyes before, and to this day I am ignorant of what colour they are; but, nevertheless, as they glittered at me unsheltered by glasses, I was conscious of a queer sensation down my backbone—a rigid sort of feeling, as if ossification were setting in.

I fought against the feeling. As a matter of fact, I was beginning to get exasperated. After playing the part of patient listener for so long, it was a little too bad to be “sat upon” in this way, as if I were an ignorant, self-opinionated schoolboy.

I looked up at him and said superciliously, as if that settled the question:

“Ah, now you are bringing an indictment against Nature.”

“She has indicted herself,” he replied, severely still, “by her attempt to repair the mischief she has wrought through bestowing too many channels of supply to one centre. Do you know that there isn’t a human eye in creation that hasn’t a blind spot in it?”

I began to see the mischief I had wrought, and endeavoured to repair it. Although I knew nothing whatever of the physiology of the eye, I agreed with him that there wasn’t a human eye in creation that hadn’t a blind spot in it.

The Professor went on:

“Nature, by putting those blind spots in the eye, as good as says: ‘See, I have given those foolish creatures more senses than they can manage; I will take as much as I can away, and I will begin with the sense that works hardest—sight.’”

He paused, as if expecting me to contradict him.

"Never again," I said to myself.

So he went on once more :

"But, alas, for her attempt at reparation ! Structural difficulties stood in her way. If the blind spots had fallen where they ought in the axis of the eye, a blank space—for which, no doubt, many of us would have had cause to thank Heaven—would always have existed in the centre of the field of vision. As it is, the blind spots in either eye do not correspond when the eyes are directed to one object ; and hence the blank which one eye would present is filled up by the other. You do not follow me. I will illustrate my meaning."

I assured him hurriedly that I followed him perfectly ; that necessity for illustration did not exist ; that I could recapitulate word for word every sentence of the "conversation." I did not like to say oration, for fear of giving renewed offence.

All in vain. The Professor took up the sheet of paper on which I had been making the estimate of my yearly income, then drew from his pocket a stylograph. With this he proceeded to make two small round dots about four inches apart.

"The guidance of the senses, indeed ! " I could hear him muttering as he did so. "It is a truism to say : If the eye saw less we should see more."

He came close to me with the paper in his hand, and once more I was conscious of a queer sensation along my spine, which seemed now to reach to the back of my eyeballs.

"You are very sleepy, I can see," he said, fixing his hard, glittering eye full on mine ; "but, if you'll be good enough to do exactly as I tell you, you'll find out precisely where the blind spots in your eye are situated. Hold this paper close to your eyes—so ; close one eye, fix the other firmly on one black spot—so. Now I will move the paper slowly backwards and forwards. Now, tell me—the black spot on which your eye was fixed has vanished, is it not so ?"

I looked up at him.

"Vanished ? No ; it seems to have multiplied itself by ten, that's all."

He smiled—sardonically, I thought.

"We'll repeat the experiment with the other eye," he said, calmly.

And I submitted, for my will seemed gone.

When the paper had once more been moved slowly backwards and forwards before my other eye, he repeated the question :

"Has the black spot vanished ?"

And, looking up at him as before, I replied :

"Vanished ? No ; it has multiplied itself by twenty."

This was speaking well within the mark, for now, as I let my eyes rove round the room, black spots seemed swarming in all directions. Only for one moment, however ; the next, they seemed to have consolidated into two only, one of which fronted either eye.

I rubbed my eyes vigorously.

"Ah, you're sleepy," said the Professor, still at my elbow. "I'll say good night. I've enjoyed my conversation with you immensely. At some other time I shall be delighted to renew it. Good night."

I jumped from my chair with alacrity to say my good-bye to him ; but the black spots rose with me, and, though I could see the long legs and coat-tails of the Professor vanishing through the doorway, head he had none.

Well, he was gone at any rate—a little hurriedly, perhaps—but still he was gone, and that was something to thank Heaven for. But he had left his black spots behind him ; or, at least, one of them, for now the two seemed to have consolidated into one, and there it was, dancing as fantastically as ever before my eyeballs. And again I proceeded to apply vigorous friction to them.

All in vain, however. Then I closed my eyes for a few minutes, and opened them suddenly, to see what that would do. It did just exactly nothing, for, as I opened them, there was that hateful black spot exactly fronting them as before, or, perhaps, blank space would be the more correct term to use now, for, somehow, the blackness and roundness seemed to have gone out of the spot, and, instead, it appeared to be a distinct blank space in the centre of my field of vision.

I looked up at the clock on the opposite wall. Yes, there was its black marble case clearly enough defined ; there, also, the inner gilt rim which framed the dial. But where was its face ? A round blank marked out to my vision where I believed it to be.

I felt dazed. Was I awake ? Was I in my right senses ? I asked myself. What black arts had that wretch been practising on me ? Had he hypnotised me, and was I even now under the dominion of his will ? And then with a start of terror I recollected that in the course of his lengthy

oration he had more than once mentioned Dr. Charcot by name, and certain of his experiments in Paris, at which he—the Professor—had been present.

At that moment ominous sounds of movement in the lower part of the house informed me that my relatives had returned, and would shortly be upon me.

"If I tell them the truth, they'll say it's champagne, and if I don't tell them the truth, they'll say it's champagne, for I feel like an idiot, and I've no doubt I shall act like one," I said to myself, miserably.

The sounds of footsteps came nearer. With them came also the sound of Mademoiselle Claire's rippling laugh, and Uncle Septimus's guffaw in response, so I concluded that Mademoiselle Claire and her mother must have arrived at the hotel door at the same moment as my returning relatives.

I tried to comfort myself with the thought that my eyesight might return as suddenly as it had left me. Then I pulled myself together, and, like a lunatic in the first stage of his disease, I resolved to do my best to hide my malady. I walked—very erect, I'm sure, but also very unsteadily—into the adjoining room, where supper had been laid, thinking it better to receive my guests with as little ceremony as possible.

I may mention that the doorway I made for, appeared to my vision destitute of lintel, and that, as I entered the supper-room, the gaselier over the supper-table seemed to poise in mid-air.

My guests had evidently returned in a lively frame of mind, and appeared to be all talking at once as they entered the room. I shook hands with every hand that came near mine, and, I dare say, with some twice over, for already I felt in a whirl as to who was who of that merry party, not one of whom, to my vision, owned to an entire head.

"Seat yourselves at once. Pray don't stand on ceremony. I'm sure you must all be starving," I said, heartily, feeling how utterly incapable I was of according precedence to any one of that bewildering company.

"So far, so good," I said to myself, as I sank into my chair at the head of the table. "I can only hope that they have sorted themselves all right."

I turned my head to my right hand. The chair there seemed filled with an expanse of crimson silk fastened with enormous green buttons. Adown these

flowed yellow satin strings, which I had no doubt were cap-strings, although my vision failed me before the cap was reached.

"Aunt Pen; that's all right," I thought. And presently, the winding up of a watch, and the remark that she "wished to goodness the clocks in London could be made to keep right time," told me that Aunt Pen it was.

Where was Uncle Septimus? The chair at my left hand seemed filled with grey silk in very straight folds, from out which extended two small, round arms, with dimpled wrists and slender fingers. In addition, I could catch a glimpse of a round white throat and pretty, dimpled chin; but there my vision ceased.

At the foot of the table, however, a wide expanse of shirt-front and waistcoat, culminating in an enormous white tie and double chin, caught my eye, and seemed to announce the presence of Uncle Septimus.

His hearty voice, making itself heard above every other, assured me of the fact.

"I told you, Edmund, when we came in—but you didn't seem to hear me—that we had come upon a friend of yours at the foot of the stairs, and had persuaded him to join us at supper. I told him you'd be delighted to see him."

So I should, not a doubt, or anybody else, for the matter of that; but which was he, where was he seated?

"If I ask, they'll say it's champagne; and if I don't ask, and make an idiot of myself, they'll say it's champagne," I thought.

I looked carefully along both sides of the table. On Uncle Septimus's right hand a chair-full of black velvet smothered in jet beads seemed to proclaim Mrs. Jolliffe's presence; on his right hand a drab satin, primly trimmed with drab lace, seemed to demand Aunt Ju's prim, drab-complexioned face as a fit corollary. Next to Mrs. Jolliffe, a black waistcoat and coloured tie announced a masculine presence, an announcement repeated in precisely similar fashion on Aunt Ju's left hand.

At random, I bowed to the latter black waistcoat and coloured tie, and informed its owner that I was delighted to see him, and was ashamed of myself for not having recognised him as he came in.

Upon which cousin Dick's voice replied: "Thank you, Edmund, I'm sure you are; but don't apologise. You shook hands with me three times when I came in."

I felt every head at that table turned towards me.

"For severe headache, like yours, Edmund," said Aunt Ju, in an acidulated tone, "I recommend a strong dose of nux the last thing at night, and another the first thing the next morning. It is better than any amount of seltzer or soda."

And following this came a long, low laugh from where a sea-green "creation," in satin and tulle, and dazzling white shoulders, proclaimed that Claire was seated.

The laugh, lacking its usual accompaniment of brilliant eyes and flash of pretty teeth, somehow did not sound so musical as its wont.

Dick sat on one side of her; on the other was the little figure in grey, who sat on my left hand.

A very soft voice presently came from out those grey draperies, and evidently with the wish to divert attention from my blunder, said:

"Cousin Edmund, I wish you could have seen the transformation scene to-night, it was lovely."

I recognised the speaker immediately, but I had no idea, till that moment, that Ruth had such a pretty voice, no, nor such pretty arms and hands either! "She little thinks what a transformation scene I am looking at at the present moment," I thought, as I ran my eye along the ranks of my faceless guests.

I say faceless, not headless, because at certain angles I could get bewildering glimpses of the upper parts of their heads; at least where the coiffure was high, as was Claire's mountain of golden hair, and Aunt Ju's assertive speckly—aigrette, I think she called it. Where, on the contrary, the visage gained in breadth what the coiffure lacked in height, as with Uncle Septimus and Aunt Pen, I could get a glimpse of full-sized ears, or frilled lace lappets respectively. But no effort on my part could succeed in obtaining a view of more than this, dodge my head, or eyes, as I might.

All words are powerless to describe the odd series of sensations that swept over me as I sat there surrounded by guests, represented to my mind only by tulle or satin, shirt-front or waistcoat as the case might be.

In view of the appetites of my relatives, I had ordered supper to be served "à la Russe." A man at a table behind me carved the dishes, so I was spared all embarrassments on that score. I dared

not attempt to eat, however, being fearful lest my hands might not find their way to my mouth. So I leaned back in my chair watching food disappearing in all directions, but seeing never one of the mouths to which the hands conveyed it in such regular succession that one could almost have beaten time to them.

After all, and looking back to that memorable evening, I think one of the most bewildering of the many bewildering sensations I experienced was caused by the small waiter, whose head only just surmounted those of the men and women on whom he waited. Those two wings of red hair and a third of an inch of forehead was all that I could see flitting in and out between the shoulders of my guests, for his body was hidden from me by the said shoulders, and his face, like the others, was a blank to me. I could not realise that that mysterious object was part of a man. I grew almost to believe that it was some bird of ill omen flitting in and out restlessly, till it saw opportunity to pounce upon something. When he suddenly hovered over my shoulders saying, "Champagne, sir?" I gave a terrific start, and a "No" that went off like a cracker.

Aunt Ju's speckly aigrette pointed straight at me. "For the nerves, Edmund," she said, from the other end of the table, "Gelseminum is better than quinine—does not leave behind the dreadful buzzing in the ear that quinine does." And then Claire's laugh was heard again.

The side of the table at which Claire was seated was far noisier than the other side, which accommodated the matrons—Aunt Pen and Mrs. Jolliffe—and the "friend" brought in by Uncle Septimus, whose face was still a mystery to me. The matrons, I think, must have been very hungry, for they scarcely spoke a word, and as for my "friend," I vow that, except to say "pass the salt, please," he never opened his lips.

On the other side of the table, however, all seemed fun and light talk. Claire appeared to be "diverted" to her heart's content, and Ruth and Dick suffered accordingly. She asked Ruth for the name of her dressmaker in Wiltshire, took out a pencil and wrote it down—she was wanting dinner-dresses, she said, and her milliner in Bond Street was not satisfactory. Then she turned to Dick, told him his collars were not high enough by a quarter of an inch, that flowered silk ties were "the thing" to wear at theatres

now; bet him a dozen pairs of gloves that he could not spell her name correctly, and when he left out the accent over the *e* in *Léclair*, told him he had lost, wrote down her name and address, the size and colour of the gloves she wanted, and desired him to be sure and get them before he started for Wiltshire on the following day.

Now this was not exceptional conduct on Claire's part. Scores of times I had heard talk such as this flow from her lips; but it had never jarred upon me before as it did now. Never before, too, had her voice sounded so harsh and rasping, her laugh so unmusical. I found it difficult to realise the large, liquid eyes that laughed with the lips, the pretty, curved corners of the mouth that uttered such ill-bred phrases.

Uncle Septimus's voice suddenly roused me.

"Edmund," he said, "it is our last night in town. I want to thank you heartily for the pleasant holiday you've given us. I've seen a lot, yes; but, I don't think, quite what I expected to see. I'm near-sighted—very—and when I stood with you, Edmund, outside St. Paul's Cathedral, I never saw the cupola and cross. No, my eye never got so far——"

"Poor old gentleman, some one should have lent him a telescope," murmured Claire.

My uncle did not hear her.

"No, I haven't seen the cupola and cross; but I saw something else—something, Edmund, which I think you Londoners, possibly, are so used to that it doesn't strike you as it does us country-folk. I mean the pinched, haggard faces of the men and women——"

"And the children," put in Ruth, softly.

"Right, Ruth; and the children who throng the crowded thoroughfares round St. Paul's. And I said to myself: 'Poor souls, poor souls, over-worked, under-paid, thriving neither in body nor soul. I would to Heaven I could take some of you back with me to the green fields, and make you see sights grander even than a grand cathedral——'"

He broke off for a moment. In that moment I found it difficult to realise that the broad, jovial features which I was accustomed to call Uncle Septimus's really belonged to the man to whom I was listening now. In their stead I could picture my dead father's pale face and thoughtful eyes. Even in my uncle's voice, now, I seemed to hear the echo of my father's when he said to me, the last time he and I ever

met, "Edmund, you'll get to the front, not a doubt; but don't forget these who lag behind!"

Uncle Septimus went on:

"So also at the pantomime, to-night, I don't think I saw one quarter of what other people there saw. No, as it happened, just outside the theatre, a man came up to me and said, in a whisper, 'For Heaven's sake, give me a copper, sir, I'm starving, and I'm trying to keep my wife honest.' One did not need to look twice at the man, to see that he was speaking the truth. I've seen starved, hunted dogs with much such a look as he had in his eyes. I questioned him as to his occupation in life, and he told me that he had been a 'super' at one of the theatres, that he had been paid off a week ago, and, though he had tried hard, could get work nowhere. I gave him all the silver I had in my purse, and—well, I shall see him again. But when I got inside the theatre, somehow I didn't seem to see the smart dresses and the spangles; no, I seemed only to see the pitiful faces of the men and women——"

"And the children," again interrupted Ruth.

"Right, Ruth, and the children who wear the smart dresses and spangles, and kept wondering what they would all be doing when the pantomime came to an end, and their occupation was gone. And when the transformation scene took place, and every one was saying how lovely it was, I didn't even see it, because—because——" Here my uncle's voice gave way, he paused a moment, then finished all in a hurry. "Well, because—I'm very short-sighted, you know."

"Ah," said a voice which seemed strangely familiar to me, "you saw more than other people, because you saw less; that was it."

It was the voice of my stranger-guest. I knew him now; he was that wretched Professor who had been practising his black arts on me, and he had been sitting here at table, as my guest, enjoying my misery.

"Where is he? Let me get at him!" I cried, wildly.

I jumped to my feet; all my guests rose also, in dire confusion. I made one desperate plunge among the empty chairs, only, however, to find myself clasping Uncle Septimus's portly shoulders in a tight embrace.

I know that Ruth tells the story in a

totally different fashion. Her statement is that, on their return from the pantomime, they found me fast asleep in my chair, and Professor von Bergmann's card on a table beside me; that Uncle Septimus caught his foot in the hearthrug, overset the fire-irons, and forthwith began a series of apologies for his short-sightedness. Upon this, she says, I jumped to my feet and seized him by the shoulders, crying, "Where is he? Let me get at him!"

I always let Ruth tell her story to the end, and then I ask her, if hers be the true version of the events of that memorable evening, how does she account for the fact that, from that day forward, Claire and I have never set eyes on each other; while she and I have comfortably settled down as husband and wife?

But, for this question, Ruth never appears to have any answer ready.

MARGUERITES, MARGUERITES !

By M. BETHAM-EDWARDS.

CHAPTER I.

It was a half-holiday, the usual Thursday's half-holiday, in the Technical School for Girls, at Grand Ville-sur-Loire; and the large, bare building was deserted. Mademoiselle Blanc, the somewhat rigid, yet coquettish middle-aged directress, seizing the opportunity of wearing her new Parisian bonnet and mantle, had taken a fiacre and set out on a round of visits.

Mariette, the good-natured, giggling maid-of-all-work, who, with a very small proportion of brains, contrived to get through the work of three ordinary domestics, had slipped out for a couple of hours' gossip and flirtation.

No one was left in the big, silent house but poor little Marguerite, the resident under-teacher, and the cat, who had three kittens, to keep her company, and the perpetual excitement of the sparrows to amuse her.

So cunning were the birds, that Minette stood no more chance of catching one than of jumping to the moon. The tantalising prospect charmed nevertheless, and could she have been made to understand that throughout her entire career no sparrow should become her prey, she would have been the most miserable cat alive.

The weather was bright and inspiring. It would be difficult surely to feel low-spirited on the first real spring day; difficult

also to stay within doors, unless they were barred and bolted.

Why, then, was not eighteen-years-old Marguerite abroad? Nothing in the shape of a duty kept her at home. A young governess, accustomed to walk about alone, might ramble in the suburban meadows without comment. She would be sure to find pupils and comrades there. Why did she linger? For half an hour she had sauntered from one empty class-room to another, in a mind of wistful indecision. The sunshine and the thought of the daisies made her long to be in the fields; her hat, parasol, and basket were ready. Yet she looked at the clock, as if counting the minutes, and lingered on.

"The postman must be very late, or have I let him pass?" mused Marguerite. "Then there is no letter for me. Pierre has not written by this mail; something is wrong."

That monthly letter from her cousin Pierre was the only event in the girl's even life. To the imagination of the orphan—portionless and dependent on her own exertions for bread—the dim figure of the young naval officer represented a tower of strength—a haven against all future ills. Neither Pierre nor Marguerite knew exactly how the compact had been brought about; but it was an understood thing between the pair, that, some day, they were to be married. Nothing, to be called love-making, had ever taken place either by word of mouth or on paper. They had not met since childhood. But Pierre seemed the natural protector of his only uncle's only child. Perhaps a chivalrous sentiment, a sense of obligation, actuated him in thus acting the part of a protector. Marguerite, for her part, loved him; loved nothing else, she said to herself.

With a little sigh, and a half inclination to weep, at last she put on her hat and went downstairs. Yes, it was good to be holiday-making on such a day. She would not waste a whole Thursday afternoon in vain regrets.

Through the glittering streets she hastened, then, leaving the grand old cathedral behind, she turned towards the quays, with their noble avenues, palaces of rich ship-owners, and crowded masts, from which stream flags of all nations.

There is this peculiarity about Grand Ville-sur-Loire, that the forest and river have reached the very heart of the city, and between bustling wharves and shady boulevards—haunt of loungers—

runs the railway, lending still more animation to the scene. Beyond, far as the eye can reach, flows the Loire, its broad blue surface broken by many a green islet. All is here—the freshness of the woods, the stir of a great seaport, the calm beauty of a river.

Many a little steamer plied between quay and suburb; omnibuses rattled along the street in the same direction; the railway also set down passengers at the extremity of the town.

But Marguerite trudged on contentedly. She could not have walking enough on a Thursday's half-holiday, and the sight of the ships always delighted her. It recalled her sailor. Past market-gardens and orchards she hastened, till at last the meadows were reached, and the ox-eyed daisies, daisies, daisies everywhere. She might have supposed them a precious, marketable crop, from the myriads of large gold and silver stars. Precious, indeed, they were; but in no marketable sense. Money could not buy such delights as the ox-eyed daisies gave now. The meadows were alive with merry voices, for Marguerite had been forestalled hours before.

Eager as the rest, Marguerite was soon ankle-deep in flowering grasses and daisies. With flushed cheeks, and lips parted in a smile, she first cut off the finest flower-heads for the adornment of Mademoiselle Blanc's drawing-room; then she gathered promiscuously for herself, and, seeking a sheltered nook, proceeded to wreath her hat. The daisy was her namesake and favourite flower. Not the rose itself was dearer to her. Thus occupied, and childishly intent upon the task, she took no heed of a man's voice calling her name.

"Marguerites, marguerites!" cried the intruder; but not till he was quite near, and repeated the words standing opposite to her, did Marguerite look up.

"Marguerites, marguerites!" he repeated, looking from the pretty flower-weaver to the spoils in her lap.

"Monsieur le Professeur!" exclaimed the girl, starting to her feet with a blush, and letting all her treasures fall to the ground.

Was it not beneath the dignity of an under-teacher to trim her hat with wild flowers, after the manner of a child?

"Monsieur Vincent!" she ejaculated, much as if his appearance in such a place were phenomenal. Nothing, on the contrary, was more natural. The hard-

worked Professor welcomed his weekly holiday with the zeal of his youngest pupil. To-day, the sunshine and the daisies made the middle-aged, at times discouraged, mathematical master feel ten years younger.

"Monsieur Vincent, and why not?" he said, smiling, at the same time putting his hand in his pocket and eyeing her a little mysteriously. "But, to tell you the truth, Mademoiselle Marguerite, I have been running after you. See how heated I am!" His right hand still fumbled in his outer pocket. "The fact is," he added, "hardly had you quitted the house when I happened to be passing by and met a great, a very great friend of yours. Guess what he gave me for you?"

That sea-letter, arriving so regularly, was no secret to the orphan's protectors and well-wishers. Mademoiselle Blanc, Monsieur Vincent, daily lecturer in geometry, and one or two others, all knew what this little Marguerite's future was to be. The pale, slender girl, beautiful by reason of her large, dark, pathetic eyes, was a general favourite, and all wished a joyous sequel to these foolish dreams.

The Professor would occasionally venture upon a little jest, if the monthly missive failed to appear; would predict Pierre's forthcoming marriage with some dusky beauty of the South Sea Islands, and tease her by a dozen stories in point.

"It was the postman. You have my letter!" she cried, with cheeks aflame, and glistening eyes. "Oh, I feel sure you have my letter!"

"What will you give me for it? All those daisies?" he asked, as he slowly produced the treasure.

Yes; it had come, the accustomed ship-letter; and, as she fondly persuaded herself, bulkier than usual. Her face became radiant. Without heeding the playful query, without so much as a word of thanks to the kind bearer, she caught the joy-gift from his hands, and leaving hat, daisies, and parasol by his side, hid herself in a little copse close by, there to devour her lover's letter.

CHAPTER II.

THE Professor watched these movements smiling, not without impatience. He had no desire to spend the whole afternoon in the meadow; he had, indeed, projected a ten miles' walk across country. But she had evidently left him in charge of her

belongings. It would not be polite, it would not be friendly to abandon them; whilst, to intrude upon her solitude at such a moment, was quite out of the question. So, resigning himself to the situation, he took off his straw hat, manipulated a cigarette, produced the "Journal des Débats," and began to read.

He was an ardent politician, and the state of public affairs just then was absorbing; yet, somehow, he found his thoughts apt to wander. Finally, the journal was thrown aside, and a second cigarette twisted into proper shape.

"What a long time that little girl is over the reading of her letter, and what a foolish business is the writing of love-letters!" mused the Professor, not to-day in his happiest, most contented mood. The spring made him feel old, and he yearned to feel young. It was not so very long since he had seen his fortieth birthday. He was really in his prime; yet a gulf seemed to separate him from that joyous girl in the copse.

Then his thoughts went back to another spring day—many and many a year ago—a day on which he had felt buoyant and youthful as Marguerite herself. The hopes that had made him in love with life then, the rapturous looking forward, the ineffable trust, these were dead as last year's leaves. No sun could resuscitate them. Would this be her fate also: such fond illusion, such painful awakening to the truth?

Had the heart prophecies of the early days come true he should not now be sitting there, a lonely, unloved, loveless man, a solitary unit in the great human family; an individuality without close-knit ties and fireside sympathies. Family life would have been his, perhaps the clinging love of children, the unspeakable looking-forward of fatherhood.

But why spend time in thinking of these things? He enjoyed the respect of his townfolk, an honourable position, the friendship of estimable men and women, a considerable amount of well-being, immunity from care. Was not that a portion far above his deserts; enviable in the eyes of many?

"But this little girl is past all bearing with," he said to himself at last; and springing from his seat, still unwilling to break upon her solitude, he repeated: "Marguerites, marguerites!"

Growing more impatient, and, if the truth must be confessed, just a trifle out of temper, he again shouted her name, and again with-

out success. Really he could not help it, he must disturb her now; the first spring holiday of the year was half wasted already. Collecting the scattered objects, and carrying his armful as best he could, dropping now her hat, now the bunch of flowers, now the basket, and stooping to pick each up with a little exclamation of annoyance, after several halts, he reached Marguerite's shady covert.

But on the threshold of the little glade, set round with hazel-trees and eglantine, he drew back in astonishment. Instead of springing forward to meet him, blushing, tearful with joy, Marguerite lay on the ground in a passion of grief, her face buried in her hands, sobs choking her utterance, whilst scattered to the winds, tossed hither and thither, were the several sheets of that eagerly longed-for, rapturously-received ship-letter.

The conviction immediately flashed across the Professor's mind. His playful prediction was then verified. Marguerite's dream-lover had played her false!

He threw down his burdens, and was at her side in a moment.

"Come," he said, very kindly, but unable, for the life of him, to regard the matter in a tragic light, "come. Has our little Marguerite no moral courage? Is she a child, to break her heart over a lost toy?"

Her first impulse was to rise, and hide the scattered sheets from his sight, to keep her terrible secret; but a sense of over-weening desolation, an unutterable craving for sympathy, got the better of timidity and reserve. And Monsieur Vincent had ever been her kindest friend. She felt sure that he would respect her confidences.

Withdrawing one hand from her burning, tear-wet eyes, she pointed to the papers.

"Read, read!" she murmured, still weeping bitterly.

Now, if there was one task above all others wearisome to the poor Professor, it was the reading of closely-written manuscript. His eyesight had been much tried, and was no longer so good as it might be. He felt daily and hourly the necessity of economising that most precious possession. The young sailor's letter consisted of three sheets of note-paper, of extra size; the small, crabbed writing covered each page. To peruse such an epistle from beginning to end would occupy at least half an hour—another precious half-hour of his fast-waning holiday! Marguerite had ever

interested him. But he was a hard-worked man, a lover of the country, condemned to sedentary occupations. Even for Marguerite's sake he did not feel inclined to sacrifice his ten miles' walk.

"I will read your letter another time, this very evening," he replied, putting the sheets together. "You and I, Marguerite, do not get a holiday every day. Let us enjoy it when we can, in spite of little rebuffs."

"Read, read!" she cried, more passionately than before. "I shall never enjoy anything again. My life is spoiled; my heart broken."

"That is surely going too far, whatever may have happened. Come, my child, listen to a reasonable word. Be guided. Let us talk as we continue our stroll."

"Read, if you care for me at all; do read what Pierre has written," she pleaded in a desperate voice.

In order to soothe her, he took out his spectacles and glanced at one page after another. Judged from a man's standpoint, from the standpoint of older and more experienced women also, the young sailor's conduct was hardly to be called blame-worthy.

He wrote in a straightforward, manly, respectful strain. The indefinite engagement had now gone on for many years, he said, and might go on for many more. Meantime, he saw no prospect of revisiting home; none whatever of promotion, which, in his case, meant the possibility of marriage. He had long felt it a duty first to her, then to himself, to break off a compact entered upon almost in childhood. His life was that of a rover; even if they knew each other well and the fondest attachment existed between them, he had no right to bind her to such a destiny. His cousin Marguerite was then free. Heaven grant that she might be loved and happy!

Such was the substance of the letter, gathered by the impatient Professor in about five minutes; Marguerite watching his face as he read. Without a word he very coolly folded the sheets, replaced them in their envelope, and handed it to her.

"Oh! is it not heartless, cowardly, cruel? If only I were a man and could meet him in duel!" she said. "'Marguerite,' he begins, 'dear, my very dear Marguerite.' How happy I was when I began to read, never dreaming of what would follow! And now he loves somebody else—I am sure of it—he would not

have cast me off else; and I am all alone in the world. I belong to nobody."

That childish outburst melted the Professor at last. He forgot his contemplated walk; his impatience, even touch of ill-temper, vanished in a moment. Carried away by a sudden impulse, bent only on comforting his favourite, wholly disconcerted by the pathos of those large, beautiful eyes, he now raised the weeping girl and kissed her on the brow.

"Nay," he said, "you belong to your friends who love you, Marguerite. You belong to me!"

No sooner was the deed done, those fond, foolish words uttered, than the Professor realised his dilemma. He had gone too far to draw back. The lover-like kiss, the still more lover-like speech, were irrevocable. Not only was his half-holiday forfeited, but something far more serious, his liberty.

But instead of being overcome by this conviction, however, he found himself growing bolder and bolder. It all became clear to him, his interest in the under-teacher, his readiness to afford her little pleasures, the alacrity with which he had followed her this afternoon. He owned now that only Pierre's image, Pierre's ship-letter had prevented him from speaking out before. Pierre was a phantom lover; but he loved her indeed.

"You cannot care for me as he did—as I thought he did," sighed Marguerite. "I am a mere child in your eyes. You kissed me just now because I seem a child to you."

"Listen, Marguerite," he said. "If you will dry your eyes and come with me, I will tell you my own story—much such a story as yours. You will understand then that I do not regard you as the little Marguerite of old. I, too, belong to nobody. Why should we not belong to each other?"

And at last the Professor did set off for his holiday walk; but Marguerite with him, Marguerite's little hand within his arm, as they threaded the country lanes; he telling her of his early life, and the disappointment that had clouded it. She forgot her own sorrows in sympathising with his; she was drawn from a world of unrealities to facts; from the dream-love beyond the sea to the true, sturdy friend at hand. A very long walk it was; and many a halt they made, now listening to the thrush and the blackcap, now gathering wild flowers and cowslips. He felt the yearned-for sense of youthfulness come

back; she was conscious of a newer, better wisdom since yesterday. That spring holiday, spoiled as they first thought for both, was to be the beginning of the true spring-tide of life, the first awakening to a pure, strong, and tender love!

SYBIL GRANT'S ROMANCE.

By MARIA L. JENKIN.

CHAPTER I. THE ARRIVAL.

JUST a little knot of rose-red wild cyclamen-blooms.

They were lying in an opened piece of tissue-paper; and the paper lay resting on a girl's lap. Her fingers played lovingly with the warm-hued, fragile flowers, and she smiled. While she was smiling the oddest thing happened—two shining tears ran over and down her cheeks; one of them fell prosaically on to the tissue-paper, making a momentary pool, and was absorbed.

The girl grew rosy; a little flush, as of anger, awoke in her eyes; surely her grief was of the sort typified by that rapidly absorbed tear?

She twisted up her cyclamen-blooms, but she did not throw them away heedlessly. They went carefully into a box, and the girl, ruffling her fingers through her brown hair, went to the open lattice-window, and leaned her arms on the ledge.

A sweet, summer-smiling country was before her. An old vicarage garden, an older church, then a shining river and green hills far and away.

The sun was lowering, but he was scorching, too; it was an August afternoon—the time when poetry becomes the most luscious of prose, and one's very soul exists in a land where it "is always afternoon."

Another, but as hot a sun was shining, and a younger month was reigning—April.

Ay, but an April grand and glorious. With the dust of the roads of La Cava reaching up to its proverbial height, and whitening coats, and hats, and boots, and even making the brown-skinned children, who tumbled about the horses' feet, dust-coloured.

An hour ago a train had come in; and the big, fashionable hotel was settling down, in the energetic southern way, to its business of entertaining high upon a

score of fresh visitors—Roman residents, who were turning tourists for a spell.

After them had come the biggest and shabbiest carriage of all the hackney-carriages of La Cava. It had nothing to say to the new hotel; loftily turned its shabby old back upon it, and, amidst a very whirlwind of dust-clouds that itself had created, turned round away from the main road up the Via Santa Serafina.

The Via Santa Serafina was the town end of a country road; and the townish end of it was passed in no time, and the country road was reached, with its dirty white way and its dirty white walls with the long-armed cactus growth atop. The sun had been so hot for a week or two, that lizards were lazily dragging their pointed tails in and out of the wall-crevices.

The lumbering old carriage turned in at the gateway of the Hôtel Swizzera. Advisedly do we write gateway instead of gate, for the old iron gate had not been used within the memory of man; in fact, it swung back on an untended mass of cactus and myrtle, saved from total prostration by one hinge instead of two.

The broad steps of the "Swizzera" showed at once a portly, brown-haired, smiling padrona. She had been born in Switzerland, but had, when a pretty chambermaid, married an Italian. She had never been back to the Alps, and took Vesuvius for her King, and the mountains of Calabria as a quite satisfactory compensation for Alpine glories. She was sixty now, and had a fame as being the best padrona of the best really Italian hotel in all southern Italy. It need not be said that Fusco, her husband, was secondary; still, a man is useful, he can see to the carriages, and mules, and asses the forestieri want.

Now to catalogue the arrivals by the big carriage. They were Mr. and Mrs. Mason, from Bedford, their son, John Mason, law-student, their two daughters, Ida and Bridget, also their niece, Sybil Grant from Long Wootton, Surrey.

There was no particular history attaching to any one of the party. The Masons were wealthy folk who had wintered in Rome. Sybil was their guest, and John, their son, was taking a month's holiday, feeling himself entitled thereto because he had accomplished the fact of passing an examination.

An hour after the arrival a huge bell was heard ringing. That meant dinner. Then, advancing from opposite doors, from the

sunlit, untidy garden, running down a broad old staircase open to the courtyard, and the balcony of entrance, there might be seen the gathering of motley folk from the far ends of the earth.

This gallery, or balcony of entrance, was broad and long; one cannot make comparisons between things so unlike, and yet it took the place at the "Swizzera" of what one would call the hall of an English house.

Mariancia, a buxom country wench, was ringing the bell, another stood servant-like at the door of the dining-room. Both were uncapped, and their black hair was plaited voluminously and fringed alarmingly to their very eyebrows; Giacomo, a third servitor, stood by the side of 'Cesca.

The Signora Fusco herself bowed and stood to introduce the new-comers to the dining-room.

"How funny!" Ida whispered.

"What a room!" was Bridget's reply.

The napery was white as snow, but coarse, and the servants—just the three we have named; the girls in their short skirts and their bright-hued kerchiefs on their shoulders, with their big silver earrings in their ears, and the strings of glass beads round their brown throats.

But the dinner—perfection; and the coffee, in the little blue cups, to finish up with—better than perfection!

Some Italian gentlemen were at one end, evidently the guests of an old velvet-capped Cavaliere, who might have been the father of the province, so patriarchal did he look, and so courtly was his bow as he entered and gave his greeting, "Signore."

A week went by.

The Masons drove about. They went to Salerno and Pœstum; they went to Amalfi; the young ones walked and wandered among the vineyards and orange gardens. Ida sketched, and then would have 'Cesca sit to her.

'Cesca was very pretty, and she had already sat to two artists, real artists; so in her heart of hearts she felt a bit lofty and gracious in turning model for the signorina, who was not making her nearly as handsome as the Signor Americano had done.

"The Signor Americano!" 'Cesca cried, jumping up from her pose against the wooden railings of the balcony.

All the world was out of sight, and Ida had 'Cesca all to herself. She had got in the girl's head, and she was painting in the orange bough which sent the sharp shadows on 'Cesca's white sleeves.

"Bother!" Ida was angry with her model; shy at the advent of the artist, who must pass her to get to the kitchen where the padrona was to be found, angry and rebellious at criticism, which she hated. "I cannot paint any more, to-day," she cried. "The shadows are all too sharp. Come earlier to-morrow."

"Sì, signorina, sì! But—the padrona?"

'Cesca preened herself as the tall young American passed, and studiously avoided the smallest glance at his rival artist or her canvas.

"I'll manage the padrona." If Ida Mason did not appreciate criticism, far less did she like to be ignored. Was that American an incipient Raffaele, that he should ignore a sister of the brush?

CHAPTER II. THE RIDE.

IDA then betook herself to the bedroom—huge, and opening on to a terrace as big as the below-stairs balcony—which she shared with Sybil.

Sybil was out, of course. Sybil always was out. But Bridget, sitting in the shadow which the old house cast on its own terrace, was writing a letter—Bridget had special letters which must get posted on special days.

"Another American!" Ida declared, "and an artist to boot."

"And he has been giving you a lesson?"

Bridget looked up. The pleasure of her letter was in her eyes, and her words, which might have had a sting in them, were made sweet.

"Not at all. That is a pleasure to come; he ignored me!"

New voices were heard coming along the hidden road—laughing voices. In three minutes the old garden was a very garden of girls, with only John Mason for guardian.

Four were American girls, the fifth was Sybil Grant. She, careless that she was, took off her big straw hat as she walked up round the laurels and myrtles, and fanned herself. A basket of violets, and anemones, and red cyclamen from the woods hung in one hand; the spring midday blazed hot, but it exhaled the sweet scent of violets and fresh green things.

"Are you mad, Syb? You'll be getting a sunstroke," Ida cried, leaning over the balustrade of the terrace, her own head sheltered by a huge scarlet umbrella.

"Not I."

And the big bell ended everything in the

way of talking, for the midday meal was ready.

The "Signor Americano"—otherwise Martin B. Slater, of Boston—sat next to Sybil, and when he appeared was greeted by some half-dozen folks as an old friend.

The old Cavaliere di San Rocucci poured forth a glad, warm welcome, and, as once again his two compatriots were visiting him, turned in his graceful old-gentlemanliness and introduced them.

One was "Il Conte Castello," the other, "My Nephew Cesare."

Somehow—perhaps by the brotherhood of the English tongue—the English and Americans had made a daily clique. Here was another American, and an irresistible link with two young Italians.

"And we'll keep to our plan," Patience Markham, a New Englander, said. "Mr. Slater," she cried, "we'll be invading the monks of Corpo la Cava this afternoon. Will you come? Donkeys are at a premium. Demetrio declares he has to pay lire uncountable, for he has not enough of his own for us all."

"Certainly I will go. Where is Demetrio? 'Cesca, where is Demetrio?'"

"Ah, signor, do I follow Demetrio when he works? Giacomo—seek."

'Cesca was imperious.

There was the planning of a ride, and by three o'clock such a string of donkeys as filed away from the "Swizzera" was not often seen even in donkey-riding La Cava.

Along the winding, dusty road, with the grey greenery of olives, and dusted cactus hedges, with the high, cloudless, blue sky above, with the heat-befilmed distance of blue mountains around. Then the road roughened, and great boulders came strewn the wild luxuriance of foliaged bank, and hollows, and so-called path.

Next, the grand, mysterious turnings of a ravine hid one rider from another, then brought quaint and curious groupings of folks together—a donkey with four feet on a few inches of rock, a donkey with four feet straddled over widest space in a gasping scramble for foothold.

All at once came a trumpet note, a bray, as of rebellion, from the lowermost, at seeing his brethren of burthen high aloft above his head.

A long laugh answered.

So much for the fun of the climb—a veritable climb.

A rush of foaming water poured down from the heights above, sweeping over curtains of fern—iridescent, dancing water

that shone over rocks, and tree-trunks, and splashed jewels of a thousand hues upon ash, and larch, and plane-trees. Sober laurels gleamed in the shade, gold of primrose, scarlet of anemones, purple and red of violets and cyclamen carpeted with flowery loom the ever-lifting land.

"More flowers! Jack, I do not care if I am left behind, and never catch you up. I must have some."

Sybil had made some milder attempts at flower-gathering—she was a flower-worshipper—but her cousin had snubbed her, and ordered her to remain on the back of her beast.

"Stuff! they'll not wait," was Jack's reply.

"Signorina, permit me." And round a bend from above there came a grey donkey's nose, a grey, bestriding figure, and a glad, excited, rejoicing, olive face.

It was the very handsome Cesare, nephew of old Rocucci. He had much experience of mountain-paths on donkey-back, so deftly ordered his steed up a perpendicular bit, letting John Mason pass him, then down the perpendicular bit he came gallantly, and was at Sybil's service.

Cesare di San Rocucci was, to use the hackneyed phrase, "like a Greek god." He was of the Naples province; his family claimed to date from far times of old. No doubt his ancestors had a drop of Greek blood in them, for their home was where the old Greeks had held sway. So, as a fact, he had the clear-cut Greek beauty.

In a moment, before her cousin's figure was out of sight, Sybil was gathering posies by the handful, and Cesare helping. The tethered donkeys reposed, munching dock-leaves in peace.

What the two said, would perhaps not be worth writing down. Cesare could not speak fluent English, so he slipped into many Italian words Sybil was not quite sure of. But she was sure of a good many words, and being a girl of spirit, talked her very best Italian, so as to show her companion she understood a great deal.

Cesare then governed his tongue; but he insisted upon it, that she spoke Italian so well, she must always speak to him in his own tongue.

"That is lazy of you!" she cried.

"Ah! then it is laziness, I will indulge. Is it not sweet to hear——"

"Not at all," came in dignified English.

"What did I say? Ah, I will learn English, that then I may say what my soul feels in the strange, difficult tongue."

IS STAMMERING CURABLE!

IS STAMMERING CURABLE!

By B. BEASLEY.

It does not often occur that what has been a man's misfortune during the greater part of his life should eventually result in benefits not only to himself but also to his fellow-creatures. The life of Mr. Beasley, the eminent authority on defects in speech, more particularly relating to stammering, is an exception to this rule. "Physician, cure thyself," would be a fitting title to a little book written by him on "Stammering: its Treatment," wherein the author alludes to the fact of having cured himself of that malady after suffering for more than thirty years. This work may be read with great interest by all who seek knowledge of the subject, and will no doubt find its way and be a valuable addition to every library, where it will prove immeasurably useful as a book of reference.

As a child, Mr. Beasley was remarkable for his fluency of speech, but an attack of low fever left an impediment which, although only slight at first, gradually developed until, as a youth, he had become a confirmed stammerer of the most inveterate type, his scholastic training having been a painful and laborious task alike to his instructors and himself. In spite of every effort on the part of his parents, who spared no expense in procuring the best advice and treatment which could be obtained, his case was pronounced hopeless and incurable, and in this pitiable condition he commenced life in the counting-house of his father—an ironmaster of South Staffordshire; but the brilliant commercial prospects thus held out to him were never realised, but faded one by one before his inability to make himself intelligible. The spirit of determination and perseverance so heavily discounted in his industrial career enabled him to compete successfully with the first amateur sportsmen and athletes in trials of skill which required no talking, and in all manly sports he was considered one of the best men of his day. He will be remembered by old Volunteers as one of the earliest promoters of the movement, as one of the champion rifle shots in Lord Bury's first English eight who competed successfully against Captain Ross's Scotch team for the Elcho Challenge Shield at Wimbledon in the year 1862, and the victor in many other competitions and athletic sports too numerous to be recorded here. It will not be supposed that a man of so

much ability and force of character would leave anything untried to rid himself of so great a curse as his impediment had long been to him.

Accident revealed to him what possibly he might never have noticed but that he had been for many years seeking a cure; but accident it certainly was which pointed out to him the first grand principle that must be inculcated before a stammerer can find relief; but it was only by dint of many years of labour, study, and research that he discovered and perfected the system of treatment for the cure of stammering which has gained him the distinction of being the greatest living authority on the subject. Having completed his own cure, the student became the monitor, at first only as a philanthropist; but so remarkable was the success attained in every individual case that he was led to adopt the cure of stammering as a profession.

Mr. Beasley does not claim to be a worker of miracles, or to possess more power than any other minute observer could obtain; he only claims to be the sole founder of a system by which he has cured himself and others of a most distressful affliction. He says:—"It is in a measure to the devotion to his profession and the fact of having been himself a stammerer for so many years, that his success with others is to be attributed"; but we suspect that not a little of this success is due to his genial disposition, for, although past fifty, he still joins in the out-door amusements of his pupils, thereby creating that confidence between instructor and instructed which is so essential in the treatment of this disorder.

In addition to his physical qualifications, he possesses other accomplishments not less useful in their nature, and, as a reader, is far from being a mean exponent of Shakespeare or Dickens. Few men could be found, supposing they had his knowledge, so well qualified for the work he is doing. And thus the early misfortunes of the subject of this sketch have proved a boon to the community at large, and led to the establishment of two institutions for the reception of pupils for treatment and instruction; one at Green Bank College, Hall Green, near Birmingham, and one at Baron's Court House, West Kensington, London, where young and old of both sexes who had thought their impediments were absolutely incurable, have had the power of perfect speech

IS STAMMERING CURABLE?

restored to them; and many whose lives might otherwise have been aimless and without ambition, have been enabled to enter the Church, the Army, the Navy, and medical professions.

It would be difficult to find a more striking example of the efficacy of Mr. Beasley's system than the founder himself, as will be well remembered by those who have had the privilege of hearing him lecture, or have read the flattering criticisms contained from time to time in the columns of our contemporaries.—*Illustrated London News*, Nov, 20th, 1886.

There are few habits which are so vexatious and trying to speaker and listener alike as stammering; yet this painful infliction is by no means scarce, even among grown-up people. By a judicious course of training, however, under competent guidance, it is almost always possible for a complete cure to be effected, especially if the stammerer be young. This was amply and satisfactorily proved recently on the occasion of the "Speech Day" given by the pupils or patients of Mr. Benjamin Beasley, at his establishment, Hall Green, near Birmingham. Mr. Beasley, whose little work on the subject of stammering is well known, undertakes to cure the young people who are placed under his care, in a very short space of time, by the identical method by which he eradicated the fault in himself some years ago. The result as witnessed on this occasion was most satisfactory. It would have been difficult to detect the slightest hesitation or nervousness on the part of any of the pupils at Hall Green; indeed, their elocution was far above the average. Mr. Beasley may be heartily congratulated on the success which has attended his efforts.—*Society*, July 14th, 1883.

The annual "speech day" at the residence of Mr. B. Beasley, Green Bank House, Hall Green, Worcestershire, which took place on Thursday, was in every sense a success. To the parents and friends of Mr. Beasley's pupils, and still more to the pupils themselves, it must have been highly gratifying. When it is taken into consideration that the majority of the speakers had entered the establishment only a short time ago as painful and inveterate stammerers, it is marvellously surprising that such results in so short a time could be obtained. Stammerers who had been afflicted for

years were heard to speak with a fluency and an articulation quite up to, if not above, the average of most people who have no impediment. The pupils were from all classes—the church, the army, the navy, the middle class, and the working man; and all testified alike to the sound and perfectly natural system adopted by Mr. Beasley, who was himself for many years terribly afflicted with this most distressing drawback to success in life.—*Bristol Observer*, August 6th, 1884.

Amongst the annual "speech days" which at this time of the year take place at the various scholastic establishments of the district none perhaps present more interesting features than that which occurred last evening at Green Bank House, Hall Green, where Mr. B. Beasley has committed to his charge many pupils who labour under the misfortune of stammering. Rather strange it would appear to most people the idea of holding a "speech day" amongst those who are generally supposed to be the least able to speak with fluency, but to the visitor who last evening had the opportunity of listening to the addresses—and in some cases the eloquent addresses—of those who a short time ago could hardly make themselves understood even to their most intimate friends, the only feeling would be that of surprise at the marvellous change which had been effected. After devoting the greater portion of his life to the study of defective articulation, Mr. Beasley has succeeded in laying down a method by which the most hopeless cases are successfully treated, as was evidenced in an unmistakable way by the clear, deliberate, and distinct utterances of the speakers last night. Indeed, one would have thought, had he not known otherwise, that Green Bank House, instead of being an institution for the cure of stammerers, was an academy for the study of elocution, so well were the speeches delivered, so admirably were the different subjects treated, and so perfect and complete were the pronunciation and inflexion of every word. The visitors arrived shortly after noon, and the greater part of the time until evening was devoted to lawn tennis and strolling through the extensive grounds. In the evening the party assembled in the drawing room, where several speeches were made, and shortly afterwards the proceedings concluded.—*Midland Counties Herald*, August 7th, 1884.

IS STAMMERING CURABLE?

TESTIMONIALS OF CASES TREATED.

The following will speak of the success of Mr. Beasley's system :-

THE REV. CANON HUTCHINGS, Alderbury Vicarage, Salisbury.
THE REV. CANON CAPEL, Abergavenny.
THE REV. ALFRED PEACHE, The Firs, Hampstead, London.
THE REV. R. BULLOCK, The Chaplain's House, Wakefield.
THE REV. RICHARD JONES, Vicar, Hall Green, near Birmingham.
THE REV. W. W. POLEY, Brandon House, Brandon, Suffolk.
THE REV. RICHARD FORT, Coopersale Vicarage, Epping.
LORD BURTON, 101 Eaton Square, London.
LADY BURTON, 101 Eaton Square, London.
SIR JOHN DON WAUCHOPE, Bart, Edmonstone House, Liberton, Midlothian.
LADY JOHN DON WAUCHOPE, Edmonstone House, Liberton, Midlothian.
COLONEL BUIST, 26 Chalmers Street, Edinburgh.
COLONEL MALLESON, 27 West Cromwell Road, South Kensington, London.
LIEUT.-COLONEL WILLIAMS, Sutton Coldfield, near Birmingham.
CAPTAIN GREENWOOD, 10th Royal Hussars.
SURGEON-GENERAL TOWNSEND.
DR. DRUMMOND, Gosta Green, Birmingham.
DR. FREER, Surgeon to the Orthopaedic Hospital, Birmingham.
JOHN WALFORD, Esq., Solicitor, Newhall Street, Birmingham.
JOSEPH ROYLE SHORE, Esq., Solicitor, Newhall Street, Birmingham.
WILLIAM AVERY, Esq., Headless Cross, Redditch.
G. P. BRAUND, Esq., Stancliffe, Barrow-on-Soar.
H. W. BURGESS, Esq., Reigate, Surrey.
DAVID CARGILL, Esq., Cowgate, Dundee.
J. M. CHUTE, Esq., Princes Theatre, Bristol.
J. A. CRAVEN, Esq., Whilton Lodge, Daventry.
EDWIN GRICE, Esq., The Fields, Newport, Monmouthshire.
THOS. KEEN, Esq., The District Iron and Steel Company, Smethwick.
SAMUEL MAYO, Manager, National Provincial Bank of England, Deal.
JAMES PIM, Esq., Bray, near Dublin.
J. L. PORTER, Esq., National Provincial Bank of England, Birmingham.
J. J. RUNTZ, Esq., 22 Moorgate Street, London, E.C.
H. SCOTT RITCHIE, Esq., 5 Crutched Friars, London.
A. VERNON VINES, Esq., Cherbourg House, Malvern.
JOHN WALKER, Esq., Dewsbury Mills, Dewsbury.
P. B. HALCOMBE, Esq., B.A., Balsham Rectory, Cambridge.
MISS MARY BOODLE, Lostock, Bournemouth.

The above do not form even a tithe of Mr. Beasley's referees.

INSTITUTIONS FOR THE CURE OF STAMMERING, STUTTERING AND ALL DEFECTS IN SPEECH.

LONDON—BARON'S COURT HOUSE, WEST KENSINGTON.

COUNTRY—GREEN BANK COLLEGE, HALL GREEN, near BIRMINGHAM.

ESTABLISHED 1876.

PRINCIPALS:

MR. B. BEASLEY.

MR. W. J. KETLEY.

MR. B. BEASLEY, JUN.

CONSULTATIONS FREE.

MR. B. BEASLEY (the author of "Stammering: its Treatment"), who for more than thirty years was a most inveterate Stammerer, discovered and perfected a system by which he cured not only himself, but numbers of others similarly afflicted.

IS STAMMERING CURABLE?

GREEN BANK COLLEGE

IS delightfully situated in its own Grounds of nearly thirty acres, being bounded on one side by a picturesque Trout Stream. Ample provision is made for all Outdoor Sports, including Cricket, Lawn Tennis, Bathing, Fishing, etc., while the Domestic arrangements are such as to meet the requirements of Pupils of all ages, **SPECIAL APARTMENTS** being provided for **LADIES AND ELDERLY GENTLEMEN**, with whom attendance at Daily Classes is entirely optional.

It is erroneous to suppose that cases of long standing cannot be cured. Many Pupils of mature age who, before consulting **MR. BEASLEY**, have thought their malady almost hopeless, have in an incredibly short time obtained relief. These eminently satisfactory results can only be traced to the **EXTREME SIMPLICITY** of the system, which in itself compels **PERFECT ACTION OF SPEECH**, and makes the Pupil a **BETTER SPEAKER** than the majority of those who have never stammered.

The daily opportunities afforded of speaking before a number of listeners form a great feature in the treatment, as by this Course Pupils learn their powers, and the nervousness which generally accompanies stammering gradually subsides, and those who before could **SCARCELY ARTICULATE** are thus able to **SPEAK PERFECTLY** before a large audience.

JUVENILE PUPILS.—In continuing the **GENERAL EDUCATION OF JUVENILES**, their work (being made principally oral) is carried on in such a manner as to be conducive to the **CURE OF THEIR IMPEDIMENT**, and embraces Latin, French, Euclid, and Arithmetic.

English Literature, comprising History, Biography, and Geography, forms a daily exercise, both for reading, and lecturing.

BARON'S COURT HOUSE

IS situated within two minutes' walk of West Kensington Station (District Railway), and is adapted for the reception of resident and non-resident Pupils.

Lessons are given privately, but periodical meetings of Pupils are arranged for practice of speaking before numbers as at Green Bank College.

[Anyone cutting out the following form and posting it, together with thirteen stamps, will receive, post free, Mr. Beasley's little work — "STAMMERING: ITS TREATMENT," and any further information required.]

Please forward copy of your Pamphlet, entitled "STAMMERING: ITS TREATMENT," to the following Address, for which I enclose 13 stamps.

Name,

Address,

MR. B. BEASLEY,
Hall Green,
Near Birmingham.

Sybil laughed.

"We must not gather any more flowers," she said.

"No? But you will like to have more!" The young man did not feel prosaic, so how could he look so? "The best I see above. I will gather them."

"No."

But he was up the bank, and his hands red in the burning effulgence of a mass of wild cyclamen.

His dark eyes were aglow as he sprang down to her side. The bronze hue of his face seemed paled over with some sort of excitement, and he fell on one knee, giving Sybil the bunch he had gathered. With as natural an impulse he touched his lips with the flowers before he put them into her hand.

"Oh! let us be quick and join the others!" Sybil cried.

She was a bit afraid. But she showed nothing but the brightest of gaiety and gladness. Nay, she seemed possessed with a furore of gaiety for the rest of the afternoon, and she bewildered the old priest who showed the treasures of the convent of Corpo La Cave. She devoted herself to Demetrio on the ride home, talked about Cesca to him, promised to go and see his old mother.

But to Cesare she was just sweetly dignified and distant.

Yet the spring went by, and she was at home.

It was golden autumn, and she was just a quiet girl, in a quiet English rectory, looking out dreamily over a smiling country on an August afternoon.

The bunch of cyclamen she had saved were out of the big bunch Cesare had kissed.

CHAPTER III. THE ROMANCE.

SYBIL'S life was a life of no note. It is said that such are the happiest lives.

Alexander Grant, her father, was one of the Grants of the county, and the living of Long Wootton had been held by a Grant from time immemorial. By consequence, Sybil, his one daughter, was afloat on the sea of county society, and was a girl who was expected to make her mark on that society. How can we describe her? She had a bright, fair beauty of her own; and when she appeared at any gathering, some electric light and verve touched folks. She was a girl of spirit, and there was a

spring of vigour and life in the way she did things. In her parish work she was idolised; but not in the way that a saint gets idolised. No; not that at all. The old folks knew that Miss Sybil would see their cottages would get the repairs they asked for, and the boys and girls knew that if only Miss Sybil chose to join them she could race as well as any—ay, and play cricket as well as any.

And for such a girl to have a romance—a hopeless, forlorn romance, as it would be if she was going to sigh away her brave woman's love for a distant, lost, never-attainable young Italian gatherer of woodland blossoms!

She was the Rector's daughter. Mrs. Grant, her mother, seeing in the future the inevitable curate-lover so plainly shadowed forth, talked much motherly worldly wisdom to the Rev. Alexander.

But, like a man, he chose his curates from a wholly rectorial point of view—the young nobles and the sons of wealth were no good to him only for their nobility or their wealth. He forgot to think of his wife's wisdom.

But Fate had befriended Mrs. Grant. The climax had come; the lover had declared himself; and he was none other than the Hon. Cyril Cave.

And Sybil said him "Nay."

Long Wootton was astonished; and the Caves, and the whole of the Earl's family, were something more than astonished.

Sybil was blamed.

The blame came to her ears, and it roused the fiery spirit in her. What did people mean by saying she had "encouraged him?" She had been polite—was she to be bearish to the curates? She never had been anything but kind, and she never would be. Mr. Cave was decidedly too self-satisfied.

So a time of discomfort had been lived through.

By Sybil, somewhat haughtily. But a living in Yorkshire had fallen into the lover's lap, and he had gone away. He had given utterance to views in favour of celibacy of late; but Mrs. Grant scorned his so rapid change of ideas, and the Rector smiled his genial "pooh, pooh!"

And a married curate, with three young babies, and a sweet wife, was at The Cottage, the place of Sybil's delight.

This was the halcyon time of August, when we see Sybil sunning herself in the afternoon rays. She had come in from tea in the curate's nursery, had slipped on

her white dress for the evening, and in the sweet, lazy delight of the time she had turned over a drawer.

In the drawer was a box, and in the box was a treasure. Yes; she had herself gravely kissed the dry, red flowers, when she had opened the paper in which they were folded.

But with her arms leaning upon the window-sill, and her gaze feeling the sweet country about her, Sybil's spirit was alert and brave, and she was as far off from being love-lorn as any girl in the whole wide world could be.

The form of her thoughts we do not pretend to give. By-and-by, across some half-dozen fields, there puffed the white smoke of a westward-bound train. The sight was common enough; it was the six o'clock train in from town, and it was a main line train going to Portsmouth.

But Sybil rose, and shaking her muslin sleeves back over her elbows, moved away from the window.

It was Saturday, and John Mason, her cousin, hard at work all the week over law-books in London, was coming down to stay till the Monday morning.

She went down the broad old staircase as she heard John's voice welcoming himself as he walked in and turned to the little room where Mrs. Grant was sure to be making up her Saturday accounts.

Then the sermon-writing was done, and the Rector, tall and spare, and grey, opened his study-door, and the boys, Sybil's young brothers, ran in, and the whole house was a welcome.

"Who do you think I saw in Regent Street yesterday, Syb?" John asked at dinner.

"Who? I don't know," carelessly. Now Sybil's face was fair and she faced a western window, yet the rosy flush that came to her cheeks was not suggestive of the sunset. She was angry with the feeling which accompanied the little flush. So more carelessly still, she laughed softly, and said: "Yes; I guess! those Jacksons we saw in Rome, and they've unearthed you. Beware, John—they are dangerous!"

"Old cats! I saw enough of them the one day I was in Rome with them. I think, too, they considered me an unpromising young man."

"Father," Sybil's gaiety was great, "do you hear him? One Miss Jackson asked him for his photograph."

"Then I agree with you in labelling them dangerous."

"Guess more wisely, Syb."

"I cannot. Wisdom is exhausted," she said.

"Slater!" was John's one word.

"No!" Sybil ejaculated. "He had taken his studio in Rome for the year."

"But do any but Romans stay in Rome this month?"

"No; I suppose not."

"He has had a touch of fever, so has come here to get it blown away. Besides, he says there is a lot of art in England worth studying. I don't know anything about that myself. There should be, or why do we give thousands for one picture?"

"Did he say anything of any one else—of the Markhams, and the Joys?"

"Not much. I think he is in the humour to study English society more than American just now. He's not half a bad fellow."

"Who ever said he was? I liked him immensely," said Sybil, with unctious. "Father, you'd like him."

"He'd come if you ask him, uncle; in fact, he'd go to any of my relations. He'll have to go to Bedford. Then——"

"That!" Sybil literally gasped. "I felt it—truly I did. But how Ida snubbed him!"

"I quite agree with you," John said, in an elder-brotherly tone. "Girls think they may do as they like. Ida had better cease snubbing now."

Mr. Slater did go down to Long Wootton, and did also go to Bedford.

The Americans of the La Cava time were, it was discovered, all in London. All were on their way home, except Slater, who was going to carry out his year's study in Rome.

In the course of the next week Sybil had met them all. By the end of another week, she and all the Rectory people were greeting Slater as a prospective cousin. Ida Mason had ceased her snubbing, and, like many another girl, proved that a snub was an offhand way of hiding a far kindlier feeling.

But the linking of the nations, which is so continually strengthened by the ease of travel, was not to find only one instance. Patience Markham gave a second example. The golden-haired New England girl would have had a second winter in the warm south of Europe; but she was to become the Contessa di Castello, so was on her way home in the fall, so that in the spring she might be ready for her Italian lover to fetch her away.

Castello was in some bureau of the Italian Government.

That was natural, his family were friends of the old Cavaliere di San Rocucci; and one's friends generally are those whose life runs in a groove like our own. It was traditional that the Rocucci should hold office under Government.

Cesare was also one of the Rocucci; but he had been but a Government clerk, at a small salary. Clerks rise, though, and Cesare was one of the men of the future Italy. His views were the views of the day—enlightened views. So he had gained promotion. He was moved from his Naples bureau to Rome; then, by a swift stroke of honour, ordered off to the Legation in London.

The news was common news amongst the gathering of English and Americans that August time. Sybil Grant spent most of her time in running up to town till September came; then, in September, she, and John, and Ida saw a small army of Americans off by a Liverpool train from Euston.

The days and the months were full. Sybil going home that same afternoon by herself, wondered, as she drove up to the sunny Rectory garden, how people could ever sneer at Long Wootton as dull!

Long Wootton was dull, though—insufferably dull to a good many people. The places on the far-edge of suburbs always are so. They have to make their own life; and nine-tenths of the world have to live at home and never touch "society."

CHAPTER IV. THE PROSE.

SNOW lay thick at Long Wootton. Christmas was over and done, and the local excitements done too. A certain number of new scarlet cloaks went about the lanes; and, really, their newness was, in a way, the most decided note of there ever having been excitement and expectation on the qui vive.

The Grant boys had just been drafted off to Rugby, and only the two small lads were at home. Mary was back at Cheltenham for her last school term, and again Sybil reigned as the one Miss Grant.

She was loyal to her opinion against the dulness of Long Wootton when any of her father's cousins up at the Hall impugned the fact; but, once tramping down the sunny lanes, after a tussle on the subject, she laughed to herself.

"Of course I stick to my own judge-

ment," she said to herself, "but, looking at things as they do, they are not far wrong. I have to 'do,' myself, the old folks and the Cottage Hospital, and things, and they do not take to 'doing.' They give one a cheque. Besides, I look at life differently. Haven't I seen heaps?"

And that very day Margaret Grant had said to Sybil:

"You have never had a season in town. You must. You are twenty—twenty in May. You must come with us, and—and—we'll make you know what life is. There is no life at Wootton; there is stagnation."

And, thinking it over, Sybil, with no one to look at her, in the country lane, laughed with a pretty, soft loudness.

"Stagnation, indeed! Do I look like stagnation?"

Indeed, no! Her face was aglow, her veins tingling with the stiff exercise of wading through the freshly-fallen, thick, light snow. No, Sybil could not "stagnate."

"Father!" she cried, bursting into the study; "I have had an invitation!"

"Is that rare?" the Rector said, quietly.

"But, listen. They feel a kindly pity for my 'stagnant' life. You'll let me go, won't you?"

"I should like something coherent to be told me first," he laughed.

"Well, the Grants have asked me to go up to Manchester Square for the season."

"And very kind of them," Mrs. Grant said.

"Mother, dear!" Sybil was full of glee, "you are as bad as they are—you have one idea in common—confess! And I'll not be put into any marriage market at all. No; I will not. If even I do marry, which is a very doubtful matter, it will probably be a curate after all."

"You are talking nonsense, Sybil. Neither your father nor I have any such base worldliness in our minds as to think of marriage"—quite lofty scorn on the word—"at every turn. I dare say you would be happier single—you are masterful." Poor Mrs. Grant! She had fire in her, and her daughter's gay despatch for masculine humanity was irritating.

The Rector laughed. "And how meek she will be when she finds her master! I fear the day!"

"So should I, if I ever thought I should see the day." With this for a topmost stone to Mrs. Grant's disconcert, Sybil disappeared.

The next moment she put her head in again. "Mother," in a business-like tone,

"has Ida sent the colour of the sashes?" Ida Mason was to be married in a fortnight.

"No—no letters ever come from Bedford by the midday post."

"Of course not. I shall have to telegraph if none come to-night. She ought to have sent it, by John, on Monday. Well, he may come to-night?"

It was a Tuesday, and John Mason had never shunned Long Wootton; of late, too, in the hurly-burly of wedding preparations, he had many a time run down to dinner, bringing messages.

So it happened. John did come down, and did bring a letter with a bit of silk, primrose-hued, in it.

After early breakfast the next morning, he was off again to "g'fnd," as he called it.

A fortnight after the snow had gone; ominous bits lying only in corners, "waiting for more," as country folks say. A bright February sun was shining, as befitted the day of a happy bride; crocuses opened golden, and purple, and white heads to the welcome warmth; a mild, soft air was making the most of himself, as if taunting the March that was to come, and the suburb of Bedford, where the Masons lived, was alert over the first gay wedding of the year.

The deed was done; Ida Mason was Ida Mason no longer, but Mrs. Martin Slater.

John Mason, and one or two others, had seen the new husband and wife off by the London train. The crowd of folks invited for the afternoon reception were drifting away.

These drifted and drifted, and thereupon came the emptiness which is the fag-end of a wedding-day.

It was not to be altogether emptiness. Sybil, on some quest for cake, or white satin ribbon, or postage-stamps, went into the morning-room, and there found John kicking his heels—irresolute, idle?

Stay—not one word of these fitted him; yet he looked each one of them.

"I am sorry for you, Jack!" Sybil cried.

"Sorry! Are you?"

Then John fell silent. The next moment he changed. He turned full round facing Sybil. Fire and decision were in his bearing, and then came—a clear and definite proposal.

"Oh, John!" the girl gasped.

That brought only a stream of more fiery lover's language, full of masterful gladness, yet prosaic and business-like withal.

"Oh, John!" came again, and Sybil's glad face drooped.

"You knew it, surely?"

"Indeed, no!"

"You don't mean you don't like me?"

"Oh, I like you so much, Jack! But not that. It does not seem possible——"

"Then, if you like me, is not that enough? It would not be natural for you and I to go into rhapsodies over each other as Ida and Slater do. We've known each other always. You are not perfect."

Sybil winced involuntarily.

"And I am not perfect—a long way off being perfect, I know." The masterfulness of John's love was waning, then it brisled up into life again. "But I'm a pretty good sort of fellow, after all—and I know just the house you would like, Sybil."

"No—no." She shrank still nearer the door.

Perhaps that shrinking nettled him.

"Why is it? Why?" he said with irritation. "Who is it? Who is there——"

"John! How dare you? There is no one. But do you think I will marry for the sake of marrying? I know—every girl must know—that marriage without love is wicked, wrong—and love is something quite—quite"—she flushed rosy, and all her spirit came to her help, and shone in the brave true light of her eyes—"quite different. I have not got it. Perhaps you have not either, John?"

"I swear——"

"Oh, hush, John!"

"Bah! I swear I love you!"

He was quite angry, and paced the room.

Her spirit did not again fail her; so she stood, and would not fly ignominiously.

Perhaps he took that quietness for relenting. To a degree he calmed himself.

"Let it be, Sybil," he said, with masterfulness still, but with no brightness. "Let it be, now. In three months—six months—no, three months, I'll come again——"

The wedding-day was spoiled for Sybil. Naturally so; and yet she quite prosaically and wisely told herself that she ought not to be made miserable by this contretemps. Of course she could not promise herself to John, or to any man under such conditions of coldness as she was experiencing.

How different love was! How different in what she had seen of it in Ida, for

instance. How different, too, was Patience Markham.

Life looked a bit dreary. She was sorry for John—very sorry. She would have done anything else for him. It might—so was she saddened in her self-communings—be right that she should try to love him—not as a cousin, but—as a wife.

All girls could not be blessed alike—oh no!

Poor Sybil! Unconsciously she was fighting for her sweet maiden's right of the romance of love, and against this she was consciously, cruelly reasoning to herself about the duties of the prose of love.

John went back to law work on the following morning, and then the bright, elastic spirit of the girl felt a momentary relief. But she stayed for a week at Bedford, and it seemed that all at once her eyes were opened to family hopes and desires.

She was quite sure that every single Mason had prejudged her John's wife, and would be grieved at any unlucky stroke fate might deal against such a consummation of family wishes.

Sybil was glad to go home; glad to meet the fierce blasts of March wind, for the wind was a lusty antagonist she could brace herself to fight against, and rise elastic from the fight.

So March blew himself away, and Sybil was none the worse for his winds. But her spirit was the worse—the tamer, for the sure, passive, still hopes of those very kind Masons.

Mrs. Grant wondered, in ignorance. She saw that Sybil was feeling Wootton dull, at least, growing older and knowing dullness. So she, good mother, found the white April days lag, and made much ado early over the new dresses Sybil would have to get for her launch into London society.

CHAPTER V. THE REALITY.

MAY was in. London was glorifying itself under crowns of flowers. The May of our late degenerate earth had had the try for mastery; but for that year he was wholly out of the field, and the May of the poets reigned. And if over the meads the hawthorn-buds made roseate summer snow, then, in London, there was the kingly, million-hued mantling of flowers for the gay state of fashion.

The Park was crowded with carriages; the old streets of fashion were a block;

the picture-galleries were a series of blocks.

And into one of these, the latest new-consecrated gallery of fashion, a lady and three girls went one May afternoon.

The lady was Lady Emma Grant, wife of Squire Grant, of Wootton, the girls were her two daughters, and our friend Sybil. They had not been in long before they met John Mason. May Grant also was soon found by a middle-aged Colonel Sale. But Colonel Sale had, for the past week, been seen wherever May Grant had been seen.

The party became separated naturally; but the division held some degree of cohesion, for all simultaneously completed the round of the first room.

"There is a pretty dress," said Sybil.

"I don't like the colour, dear," Lady Emma answered.

The said costume was of silk, in terracotta shades, ranging from the mass in pale, to accessories in ruddy red. The wearer was a dark girl—a typical southern beauty, and she and her dress made a picture of tropic sunlight and burning shadow.

"No," Lady Emma went on; "it's old-fashioned. I have a gown of my grandmother's just the same. Hideous!"

"We never shall convert you, Lady Emma."

"No, my dear—no, I can't say I admire guys. There is another one for you."

Then they went down the few shallow steps of the first room, and standing at ease, so to speak, in the fine entrance-hall.

Lady Emma was tired of pictures; she elected to sit and "look at guys," she said, with a sparkle of her bead-like black eyes at Sybil. So she sat comfortably enjoying herself in her brown satin of unfashionable shade, wearing her faultless lemon-colour gloves and fanning herself with a huge black fan.

"You'll not see any!" was Sybil's shot.

"Go away."

Margaret was waiting; John Mason was midway between her and Sybil, then all went out of sight.

"Slater's picture must be in this room."

"Yes," Sybil knew exactly where to look for it.

As Sybil stood gazing at Slater's picture, her face paled. She did not look long; she even suddenly moved away, and as she moved the smile was gone from her lips, and without it her face bore a look of grave seriousness it had only worn of late.

Turning into the crowd she brushed the

sunny silk of the beautiful dark girl. In so doing she separated her from the gentleman who was with her, supposedly, her father.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" Sybil's grave face smiled as she involuntarily spoke.

The dark gentleman gravely lifted his hat.

"Signorina," he said, bowing. The speech of each one was that of impulse.

There was nothing more of note to Sybil in the gallery. She did not appreciate the pictures her cousin told her she ought to admire.

"I am so self-willed," she laughed. And she carried herself and her catalogue along independently.

And with an air of command, so John took it, she silently ordered him to leave her and attend Margaret Grant. For herself, she felt she could not have endured the presence of John patiently. She was bringing herself to see that he quite meant the renewing of his proposal, and the three months of grace would be up in less than a week. She would then change her "No" into "Yes." A stoical, miserable "Yes," but—why should she rebel? John was very good, and every one wished this thing.

Only—only—just at that moment, with the sight of 'Cesca's picture, with the hearing of that unexpected one Italian word, she felt that John was hateful—hateful!

These moments of utter and entire rebellion do come to us—

For that afternoon Sybil made herself free; she soon set her back on pictures, and sat with Lady Emma. At least, Lady Emma would keep her wholesomely in the present, she was a very genial old person, and enjoyed her annual London season quite as much as her girls did. She ridiculed heaps of things; was violent against some others; but the house in Manchester Square was, nevertheless, always kept up to the latest style, and her people had to carry out their service in the latest details of the latest mode.

On that night there was a reception at Manchester Square; on the next night, a fancy ball; on the following, a dance at an ambassador's. So the time went.

Some joke had made Sybil declare she would be a sibyl; so, a sibyl she was, robed in a mantle of saffron colour, and with a circlet of ruddy gold confining the coils of her wayward brown hair.

At one time the sibyl sat by a Neapolitan peasant—curious juxtaposition.

"Your dress makes me happy!" she cried, putting her hand on the thick, gay, woollen skirt of the girl.

Then a sudden gleam of recognition flashed into her eyes: it was the sunny girl of the picture-gallery.

"Truly!" The word was a translation, and the next words were spoken with a very marked accent. "Then I am happy that I make pleasure for you. It is only the dress of my peasant sisters."

"Yes." For dear life, Sybil, at that moment, could say no more; she scarcely fitted her strong-minded impersonation.

"And you; you make the queen of the room, it has been said to me. My father said it, my cousin said it." The girl's dark eyes beamed admiration.

"Oh, what nonsense! I am a bundle! I cannot waltz a bit. Do you remember me? I was so rude as to push against you."

"Ah, yes! And I could not remember. Your face I knew; but there is so much"—she spread her pretty hands abroad—"so much that is different!"

She ended with a laugh.

There was no time for more, for John Mason came up and said Lady Emma was in a fidget to go. It was late, so on, so on.

And the majestic sibyl floated away on the arm of a British tar.

Again—another momentary scene.

It was in the rooms of an Embassy. Stars of the highest orders of Europe; decorations bestowed by mighty Princes dazzled one's eyes. Diamonds flashed as beautiful women moved. Royalty was present; and to hear the names of the guests made one feel that history was alive, and the past was a real thing for living hands to touch.

Quite late there came a stir, as if some people of note were arriving. Where Sybil Grant stood she could see well.

A murmur of names in the voices of servants got drowned in the wordless buzz of the crowd. But a syllable caught Sybil's ear, and it was the soft vowel-ending of Italian.

At the same moment, a tall, dark man, with his closely-cut hair iron-grey, his breast a mass of orders, and his whole bearing princely, entered the room.

It was the Prince X. Y. Z. in London, and staying at the Embassy.

On his arm was a dark girl, all creamy

satin and diamonds. She carried a big bouquet of red cyclamen, and in her hair was a scattering of the warm-hued wild blooms. That was Sybil's girl of the peasant dress.

Behind, came the Ambassador himself; and behind again a following of embassy notabilities. Amongst them was Cesare Rocucci.

Sybil was standing, a tall, white sheen of satin, too. She felt herself tall, conspicuous. She would sit down.

There was not a vacant chair.

For a moment her brave spirit failed: her one desire was to get away, to hide, to go home. Where had the Squire gone? Where was John? But no, she did not want John. She recoiled in spirit from John.

Suddenly her cheeks, which were pale, had flushed rosier than her roses. John, the contemned John, was making his way steadily towards her through a mass of men.

Sybil saw, but she forgot John; utterly and for ever ignored him, though he was a big and stalwart hero, for, in his wake was a greater hero for Sybil.

Cesare Rocucci had seen her from the distance, while he was paying his devoirs to his host. He had seen, too, John Mason, and had bidden him renew the acquaintance of the old La Cava days.

In a crowd, one is much alone.

There is a truism, old as the world. Wedged in amongst hundreds there were our two friends Sybil Grant and Cesare Rocucci.

They were talking fast; half in English, half in Italian.

"Shall I say something?" Cesare said after a lull.

"Have you not already said much?"

"When I saw Maddalena, with her bouquet of the cyclamen, my soul was like fire! Ah!"

"And I think I felt quite cold."

"Sibilla! carissima! Then you remembered——?"

"Signor Rocucci, you are growing inquisitive!" with a flash of pretended offence. Then with one of her quick, bright changes, Sybil's sweet lips smiled, and her hand actually clutched at Rocucci's arm. "Cesare!" she whispered; "Cesare!"

They were quite alone, you see.

And more people swelled the protecting crowd, and there were sounds of music, and—somewhere people were dancing.

Sybil never moved from that big first room.

Many things happened after that night; but we have no space to tell of them.

By way of rounding an unfinished detail, we may say that John Mason did not, in consequence of certain measures Sybil took, let his life go piecemeal to the winds. He and Margaret Grant joined forces, and both together will, no doubt, make a fine social success.

Sybil's life is too complete to be desecrated by words. When she was married, she made all her bridesmaids wear cyclamen. That is all we tell. And cyclamen, in England, cost money!

PRIMROSE AND VIOLET.

By SUSAN K. PHILLIPS.

Primrose and Violet linger late
(*The wild winds sweep over Whitby Bay*)
"But what is blossom or bloom to me?"
Sighed the girl who gazed o'er the angry sea,
Over the great grey tossing waves,
From the mighty Head, with its crowded graves.
For the smack where her lover had shipped, she
knew,
For a week and a day was overdue,
And in wrath he had sailed away.

Primrose and Violet nestle sweet
(*The wild winds rave over Whitby Bay*)
In the mossy nooks of the wooded dells,
Where softly the voice of the ocean swells.
And all for a posy he sought, she heard,
And gave to another! The jealous word,
And eyes averted, and sullen lip,
Sent her sailor away in the missing ship,
And his sweetheart weeps to-day.

Primrose and Violet, once he swore
(*The wild winds wail over Whitby Bay*)
His lass should wear when the bells rang clear
Over town, and harbour, and sands, and pier,
And down the steps of the steep cliff side
He led to his cottage his bonnie bride;
And now does he lie, her gallant tar,
Where the blast and the storm his mourners are,
His shroud the flying spray?

Primrose and Violet, gleaming bright
(*The wild winds roar over Whitby Bay*)
"They may seek them to deck my grave," she
thought,
Knowing the wreck that the gale had wrought,
Nay, dash the tears from the bright blue eyes,
The sun breaks out in the fitful skies,
It strikes on the broad brown sails she knows,
Where true and steady the brave smack goes,
On her wild and perilous way.

Primrose and Violet blossom fair
(*The wild winds blow over Whitby Bay*)
The breaking surges are hard to stem,
But Bill's strong hand is firm on the helm.
Over the lip of the cruel scar,
Over the rollers fierce on the bar,
Through the crowded piers, all flecked with foam,
Battered and worn, she staggered home;
"Forgive," each met to say.

Primrose and Violet star the banks
(The light winds laugh over Whitby Bay)
 Gay hands have reft them of many a flower.
 The chimes clash out from the old church tower,
 The boats are dressed with the flags that fly
 Red, blue, and white 'neath the April sky;
 And the royal sunshine dazzling down,
 Touches to glory the red-roofed town—
 Fair bode for a wedding day.

A MAGIC INHERITANCE.

By L. WALKER.

Two hundred and fifty years ago the now insignificant village of Vollmarstein had several recognised claims to importance. It was celebrated far and wide for the strength and grandeur of the baronial fortress; for the ancient chapel of Saint Walpurga, which stood on the summit of the hill; and for the busy fair, or Kirmesse, held in the market-place yearly on the feast of Saint Walpurga, that is on the first of May.

The castle is in ruins now; the chapel is a mere tradition; the fair no longer attracts merchants, pedlars, pilgrims, minstrels, jugglers, dancers, and players; and the Vollmarsteiners have forgotten those good old times when the Saint, the Baron, and the first of May were the chief articles of the village creed.

The Saint was, of course, only visible at the rarest intervals to the purest eyes; her authority and influence were represented by holy priests, who lived beside the chapel and ministered there. There was especially one of these priests, Father Paul, whose name has been handed down from generation to generation, surrounded by a halo of ascetic purity and self-devotion.

The Baron, in the days of Father Paul, was almost as much of an absentee as the Saint; and while he was far off at the imperial court, he deputed Arnold Weber, of the Meierhof, to farm the baronial lands, and to sit as president in the baronial court.

Master Arnold Weber was both shrewd and self-confident; his many responsibilities sat lightly on his broad shoulders; even in the most difficult cases which came before him his decision was prompt and unwavering; and in only one trial during his long career had baffled suitor or condemned criminal impugned his infallible wisdom.

The criminal was a strolling gipsy-woman, who had come, carrying a baby-girl in her arms, with the other mountebank folk to a certain Kirmesse; the crime of which she was accused was sorcery; and the sentence was—death.

The Vollmarsteiners loved to tell the story at great length. It ran thus: The gipsy, when she had collected a great crowd about her by dancing as no woman had ever been seen to dance before, and by playing on an unknown instrument with a skill which events proved she must have derived from the Father of Evil, had volunteered to try on any confirmed sufferer a wondrous power of healing, which, she asserted, had been taught her by a wise woman in the Far East.

The crowd pushed forward one, Michael Schneider, well known as a martyr to shooting pains in his limbs.

"Stand there," said the gipsy-woman, "facing these good people, but fix your eyes on mine."

She herself turned her back to the assembly, so that only her patient saw her gestures, and the expression of her countenance. When he afterwards, as a witness at her trial, tried to describe what had occurred during the few minutes that ensued, he stated on oath that the gipsy had moved her hands slowly in front of him, that her face grew pale, and her features contracted, that her eyes dilated and flashed with unearthly light which stupefied him; that she then seemed to spread out before him, to obliterate from his mind all thought, all power, all understanding, and that he knew no more until he came to himself, and heard a general outcry that he had been bewitched, in which opinion he fully concurred; and though he was obliged to confess that the limb over which the gipsy had passed her hands troubled him less than the others, he looked upon the success of her treatment as a proof of its diabolical origin.

It was Father Paul who had first discerned the unholy nature of the proceedings. Passing through the market-place, his attention had been arrested by the sight of Martin standing rigid before a strangely-clad woman, who was slowly raising and lowering his arm. His suspicions were aroused, and soon confirmed when he had repeatedly, and with ever-increasing emphasis, but without result, called on Martin to come down from the little stage on which he stood. He had then with uplifted crucifix approached the sorceress, and commanded her to loose this poor soul from the spell which bound him. The spectators had taken their cue from the priest; the gipsy was forced to obey; but the holy man caught the sound of a mutter which greatly resembled a curse.

A week after the Kirmesse, Master Arnold Weber, at the head of the elders of the village, pronounced the condemnation of the vagabond dancer to a terrible death. Father Paul vainly offered her the rites of the Church. She clasped the little girl she had brought with her to the fatal fair closely to her heart, and refused all other comfort. Finally, Hans Marx, the Baron's paid scharfrichter,* piled up and lighted the faggots round her on the very spot where she had given such incontestable proof of her commerce with the powers of darkness.

Even as the flames rose round her, she persisted in her contumacy, and she invoked the vengeance of Heaven on her accuser, the priest, and on her judge, Arnold Weber, calling all present to witness that though the day of retribution might tarry, it would come at last. Then, changing her tone, she implored, in the name of Heaven's charity, that some one would take charge of the little innocent child she had left in the prison. Her denunciation and her appeal remained alike unnoticed, till the victim's agonised struggles were over, when Lisbeth Marx, the scharfrichter's wife, came timidly forward and promised—to the ears which could hear no longer—that she would be a mother to the orphan.

Had any other woman ventured to show so much compassion to the child of a sorceress, she would have lost caste for ever; but the family of the hangman had no caste to lose. They were, by virtue of their degrading office—which, by the way, was stringently entailed—as vile in the eyes of their fellow men as Jews, heretics, and the other outcasts of mediæval society. They could acquire no additional taint from their connexion with the little child whom Lisbeth took home and had baptized Gerlinde, after the baby she had buried a month before.

After a while, the excitement cooled down, and things in Vollmarstein recovered their equilibrium. Neither on Father Paul nor on Master Weber did the witch's malediction work any evil. The former continued his vigil of pious ministry at the mountain shrine, and the latter held on his busy way through life. There was but one flaw in the tissue of his success: his only son, Bruno, who by natural law should have trodden in the steps of his father, had insisted on being bound apprentice to a great printer far

away in learned Leipzig. Master Weber had at first refused; but his son had carried his point, and for seven years had been in distant Saxony.

Meanwhile in the scharfrichter's hut, behind the castle, the little girl Gerlinde grew up, and developed a comeliness of which any mother, natural or adoptive, might have been justly proud. She had crisp dark hair; a small oval face; bright brown eyes, which flashed now and then as no other girl's eyes in Vollmarstein knew how to flash; graceful gestures, with which she emphasized her easily-roused emotions; a carriage which ennobled her tall, elastic figure; a musical voice, which lent unwonted inflexions to the rough, Westphalian dialect. But these gifts, which should have carried all hearts by storm, were all inherited from her wicked, outlandish, vagabond mother, and rather prejudiced men's minds against her, so that the most beautiful maiden in Vollmarstein had only one possible suitor, to wit, Hans Marx, Lisbeth's eldest son, who had now succeeded his father in the opprobrious office of gaoler and scharfrichter.

Hans Marx, pariah though he was, was not an unpleasant man to look on; nor had he, despite his brutal profession, an unkindly heart. He was a little weak and irritable but Hans was, notwithstanding his faults, a good son to his mother, and had borne, with more than brotherly forbearance, the whims of his little foster sister.

He and Gerlinde were considered, in the village, as betrothed by the natural fitness of things. What other man would woo the child of the vagabond sorceress? What other maiden could the son of a disclassed line dare to woo?

The Marxes had always had difficulties in their wooing and wedding. For this generation the difficulty was solved, and Hans himself was ready enough to accept the solution; but Gerlinde was not so easily convinced of the correctness of public opinion.

Hans had reached the age of seven-and-twenty. His years fully qualified him to assume the responsibilities of married life. He had made many unsuccessful attempts to bring the matter before Gerlinde's notice; and, as time passed on, he grew more and more eager for his question to be answered—favourably of course. He thought of it continually: while he cleaned the kennels and tended the wolf-hounds; while he and Gerlinde worked in the garden; while they sat by the fire or at the open door in

* Torturer and hangman.

the evening; when he lay down, while he slept, and when he rose the idea was ever with him; and he took his opportunity one fine April morning when they were planting the potatoes.

"Ah!" said Gerlinde, looking up, "there are the swallows back again. Spring is early this year. Last year they did not come till after the Kirmesse."

"It is a good sign," replied Hans. "The weather will be warm; there will be the more merchants at the Kirmesse, and the more pilgrims at the shrine."

"I wish," said Gerlinde, irrelevantly, "that I could go on a pilgrimage."

"Why," asked Hans, "do you want to go on a pilgrimage? the holiest shrine in Westphalia is only half-an-hour's walk from our door."

"I should like to go to Cöln, or even to Antwerpen," replied the girl. "I should like to see what the world is like away beyond these hills."

"You would find nothing better than you had left here."

"Shouldn't I? How do you know? You have never been. I wonder you yourself do not wish to go."

"Why should I wish to go?"

"If," said Gerlinde, "you went away somewhere where no one knew that you and your father and grandfather had followed a calling which all men despise, would you not be happier?"

"Some one must be scharfrichter," he answered. "I am used to living as we live. I should have Heimweh, if I went away from here. I should die if I could not come back."

"Should you?" Gerlinde spoke contemptuously. "Well, I shouldn't."

"Why do you talk of such things, and in such a way?" asked Hans, reproachfully. "I do not feel ashamed to say I should die of Heimweh in a foreign land, and I tell you, moreover, that if it were possible for you to go away, the loss of you would be worse than Heimweh, and I would not live on any account."

Gerlinde shrugged her shoulders unsympathetically. With the gipsy blood throbbing discontentedly through her veins, what did she care to be told that her presence was the haven of rest to a home-loving heart?

But Hans was not going to be discouraged this time. "Gerlinde," he went on, "I know why you feel so restless as you do now. I said, just now, that I did not mind following my father's calling—that

was not quite true. I know how bitter it sometimes is to be an outcast, without any fault of one's own. You and I are outcasts. You fret about it, I think, but I love you so dearly that for years I have ceased to care what value I am to any one but to you. If you would be my wife I would try to be all to you that you cannot otherwise have. Say you love me, Gerlinde."

His voice trembled with emotion, but Gerlinde's was perfectly calm as she replied: "I love you, Hans, but not as a girl loves her lover. See, your hand trembles as it meets mine. I see your colour change; now you could not make me tremble, or my heart leap till my face betrays it."

"Ah!" he said, "you are young."

"Not very. I shall be one-and-twenty this Kirmesse; many brides are younger than I."

"Then that's all the more reason for you to listen to me."

"You mean," said Gerlinde, "that if I refuse you, I may wait long for another lover." She knew the story of her parentage, she alluded to it without visible emotion. "And you," she continued, "would have to seek far for a bride."

"Gerlinde!" cried her lover, "if I were free to choose from all the women in the world I would ask you, and you alone to make me happy."

"Perhaps you would, Hans; but still there is a doubt in my heart concerning myself."

"But," Gerlinde, if you would only think——"

"I do think, Hans, it is the thinking that shows me the difficulties." Then with a sudden relenting she added, "I will tell you what I will do. It is now ten days to the Kirmesse; you will leave me in peace till the vigil. I will go every morning to the shrine and tell the saint all that you have said, and all that I feel; perhaps she will give me a sign, and on the day before the fair I will give you my answer."

"Yes," said Hans, with a radiant face, too sure of the justice of his claims on Gerlinde to doubt of the saint's co-operation. "Let us go to the chapel every morning, and I will pray for a sign, too."

"Make your prayers, by all means, if you feel so disposed," replied Gerlinde, decisively; "but if I go to the chapel, I go alone. That much is understood."

So alone she went, puzzling and dream-

ing over her future every morning as she climbed the rocky, well-trodden path among the pines, which led to the ancient little shrine, in the grassy opening at the top of the hill.

The daily pilgrimage and her meditations occupied a great deal of her time—not that she knelt so long before Walpurga's altar, but because, as she went and returned, the thread of her reverie was so often broken by the violets, and schlüssel-blumen, and anemones, which looked up from the spring grass; by the delicious love-songs of the birds, and the fascinating dances of the insects. On the whole, it was more agreeable to linger in the forest than to hurry home; and as to making long prayers—why, if the saint could hear a request, and know an earnest supplication from one which was merely formal, she could be in no doubt about the sincerity of her present suppliant. Nevertheless, she did seem to turn a deaf ear, and eight days slipped away, just as any other eight days of the year might do, and Gerlinde began to be afraid that the decision of her future lot in life would have to be made by her own unaided judgement.

As yet, Hans had asked no questions, but he looked eager and happy. She knew he would not wait one moment beyond the appointed time to renew his suit. And then what answer should she give him?—that she would take him, she supposed. What alternative was there?

The prospect of plighting her troth to Hans, the scharfrichter, presented itself to her from many different points of view as she went slowly up the hill on the ninth morning, the last day of her probation, the day before the Kirmesse. It absorbed all her thoughts and interest, not for a moment did her perplexed mind relax into an anticipation of the varied excitements which were in store for the Vollmarsteiners; which would begin with the arrival of the strangers that day; which would be continued in the fulfilling of all the traditional rites and ceremonies in honour of Saint Walpurga on her vigil; which would culminate with the manifold delights of the morrow, and conclude with a general feeling of slackness and weariness, when the last bargain had been concluded, the last dance danced, the last booth stripped of its gewgaws.

The sun had not been able to show his face when Gerlinde reached the chapel. A white mist, which had risen from the river in the night, shrouded the neighbour-

ing heights, and hid the village below, so that she seemed to stand alone with the saint, whose sympathy she had hitherto been unable to waken. She felt a little downhearted; she was wavering between two doubts, each equally harassing. She had heard that the omnipotence of the saints was called in question in some places by men even as holy as Father Paul. Perhaps the saint had been silent because she was powerless to help? or was it possible that the answer had come, and the sign been given, which she, an ignorant girl, had not seen or understood? And then a voice in her seemed to cry out: "Take Hans Marx for thy husband. He loves thee, and will do his best for thy happiness; while every one else—perhaps even the saint—despises thee."

That was the frame of mind in which she said her prayer that ninth morning, and then she got up to leave the chapel. She went no further than the door, however, for there a sound of approaching footsteps caught her attention, and she stopped in the porch to listen. Above her head the sky was a deep blue; somewhere the sun must be shining gaily, but just here the morning mist was master of the situation; it had gathered so close round the hill-side that even the pine-trees, which bordered the glade and the hut of the holy father, were but vaguely visible. The steps came nearer. It was not Father Paul walking in the forest; his feet were bare; and Hans, who after her prohibition would hardly have ventured to follow her, wore clumsier soles than those which were now ascending the stony path. Presently she saw emerging from the soft, white mist-curtain, a tall, broad-shouldered man, whose costume was not that of a Westphalian peasant, nor quite the same as that of the merchants and salesmen who attended the fair. If Gerlinde had known anything about the wide world beyond the narrow valley in which she lived, she would have recognised, in the neat, close-fitting garments and the small round hat, the garb of a handicraftsman of some important guild. The stranger differed as much in himself as in his clothing from the personal appearances which made up her experience. His face was smaller and less florid than the faces she was accustomed to; his hair and beard were cut and arranged with superior taste; his eye had a keener, nobler expression; his movements more ease and self-possession. If he were a pilgrim he was

younger and more influential-looking than the majority of pilgrims; if he were a merchant it was strange that he should make such an early excursion to pay his respects to Saint Walpurga. Gerlinde continued to inspect him, and to surmise as he came briskly forward to the doorway where she stood.

"Good morning to you," he said politely — then more to himself than to her he continued: "So I have reached the old place at last; I thought I knew the way, but who could find anything in such a fog?"

"Ah," replied Gerlinde, "these forest paths look all alike to strangers."

"But I am not a stranger," he rejoined. "I know the paths one from another, though it is a long time since I trod them. If you find them puzzling, I would venture to advise you to stay where you are for the present. I know, by old experience, that Saint Walpurga will not lift her veil for another half-hour."

Gerlinde looked at him with a little surprise. "There are not many," she said, "of those who come to the Kirmesse, who would undertake to find their way in these forests, or to predict how long these mountain mists will hang."

"Nor would I," replied the stranger, promptly, "if my acquaintance with Vollmarstein was so casual as you suggest. But I was born and brought up here; and though at Leipzig I have wandered in other woodlands and watched weather which has apparently different rules from that which I watched in my boyhood, I have not forgotten a certain skill I flattered myself on possessing seven years ago."

"Ah!" exclaimed Gerlinde, a sudden light breaking in upon her, "then you are the son of Master Weber of the Meierhof."

"I cannot deny the accusation," he replied, "but may I ask how you could know me?"

"Why, every one in Vollmarstein would know you by what you have just said, though you are greatly changed by your beard and by other town-cut clothes from what you wore when you went away; but I recognise you now."

"Well," replied Master Weber's son, "you have a decided advantage over me. I should have pronounced you to be as completely a stranger to Vollmarstein as you would have pronounced me. Surely I knew every face in the village when I left the place; and I could not have forgotten yours, though you could only have been a child then."

"Perhaps you never noticed me. I live with Lisbeth Marx in the scharfrichter's cottage. The people at the Meierhof would scarcely ever see me."

As Gerlinde made this humiliating admission, her colour deepened a little; but she did not lower her eyes from his. She had an intuition that from his standpoint things might have a wider and more generous horizon.

"Yes, yes," he said, "I see now; you are Gerlinde. I might have guessed it had I been as shrewd as you are. That is why you are so unlike the other girls." For a moment her eyes fell; it was disappointing to see that her intuition had been partly incorrect. "But whether," he continued kindly, "you need consider that your loss or theirs, I will not take upon me to say, lest you should think I was trying to flatter you."

She scarcely understood the words, but their tone was easy of comprehension, and she could read the look which accompanied them. It was not a look of bold admiration such as a town-bred stranger might cast upon a pretty peasant. It was a look more of pity and compassion; it had more discernment and interest in it than any scrutiny which had ever before been accorded to Lisbeth's foster-child; yet, as she felt its depth and sympathy, Gerlinde realised more truly than her untutored soul had ever yet realised that she was and must be an alien and an offence to all but those who were bound to her by a like birthright of shame and ignominy.

With a brusque good-morning, she turned quickly away, and left Master Arnold's son looking after her with an interest which changed to regret as the mist hid her from him.

So Gerlinde had prayed all her prayers, and the saint had remained obdurate to the last. But with the immediate prospect of imparting the result to Hans himself, her submission and her philosophic acquiescence in the most obvious solution of her difficulty took wings and left her rebellious and miserable.

"I will not marry Hans," she said aloud to herself. "I would rather die to-night and be buried, instead of seeing the trees come into blossom."

Then she dismissed the subject from her thoughts, and fell to thinking of all that Master Bruno Weber had said, and of his kind, keen gray eyes which had looked at her with such friendly frankness.

All the morning Gerlinde lingered in the

forest. She did not want to see Hans till she was obliged to. In the afternoon he would put on his best clothes and go into the village to see the pilgrims and merchants come in; then she would go home. But when at last she reached the castle gateway she found she had reckoned without her host. There was Hans in gala attire, apparently waiting for her.

"Why, Gerlinde!" he cried, "how late you are. Come along quick."

"What for?" asked Gerlinde, with some asperity.

"Why, surely, you remember," said Hans, "that you promised to give me your answer to-day. See, I have brought you a troth-ring. I am going to wear my father's. Uncle Josef and the cousins from Herdecke are in the house, and Father Paul has come to bless our betrothal."

"Hans!" cried Gerlinde, "you had no business to make these preparations without consulting me."

"But I did ask you, Gerlinde. Don't you remember what you said? I have been to the shrine, too. I saw the saint in a dream; and Father Paul told me——"

"I don't care what Father Paul told you, or what you saw in a dream. I will not plight my troth to you!"

"Gerlinde!"

The sound of their voices had reached the house. The expectant guests, headed by the priest, came out.

"My daughter," said the holy man, "do not delay any longer. My time is valuable. I am waiting to speak a blessing over your joined hands."

"You need not wait to speak a blessing over me, Father," returned the girl calmly. "I have just told Hans I will not place my hand in his."

"Just a woman's whim," interposed Uncle Josef. The cousins assented. Gerlinde shook her head. She felt strong enough to resist them all, as if some great force had been born in her which she could not understand.

"It is no whim," she said. "I would sooner die than marry Hans."

"Girl!" cried Father Paul, "this is foolishness. Hans is a worthy man, despite the calling he was born to follow. In this matter he is not acting without guidance; and will you reject his honest love, and dare to raise your will against the voice of the Church, as your mother did before you?"

It was not the first time Gerlinde had heard this reproach; but to-day the words fell on her ear with a fuller meaning. She

could not but resent them. She drew herself to the full height of her noble stature, and, looking round on them all, cast down her defiance without visible excitement.

"Whatever my birth may be, no man, no power on earth, shall force me to link my life to one I do not love as a wife should love her husband. Nor will I hear any more foul words spoken of my mother, who was perhaps as innocent in God's eyes as her accusers. I shake off the dust of this place from my feet. I come of a wandering race. There are lands where none know the shadow that has rested on me here."

"Silence!" thundered the priest. "This is blasphemy. The evil spirit of her mother is awakening in her."

"Gerlinde," cried Lisbeth, "hush, my child! You are beside yourself."

"Gerlinde!" echoed Hans, fiercely. "You shall not go. I will not suffer it."

"Not suffer it!" repeated Gerlinde, letting her calm, determined eyes meet the wrath of his look. "Great Heavens! that you should talk of force to me!"

She drew a long breath, and something stronger, deeper, mightier than she had ever felt before filled her being. She scarcely remembered where she was. She only existed in the overmastering desire to vanquish her would-be oppressors. She saw the angry light fade from Hans' eyes, she saw an unwonted pallor cover his face. She did not understand what had happened, but she knew she had gained some great, mysterious victory. Then she heard Father Paul's voice:

"Come, my son, time presses. We will postpone this ceremony, and you can come and assist me to clear the weeds from the steps of the chapel. This foolish girl will remember her words, and repent of them. Until then, she is better alone." He paused. Hans made no response, no movement. "Hans Marx!" he repeated, "do you hear?" with the same effect. Then a look of horrified wonder and anger filled the priest's face. "I spoke but too truly," he said, striding forward, "when I said that the spirit of her mother was awaking within her. She has bewitched Hans as the sorceress bewitched Martin Schneider twenty years ago."

There was a wild chorus of dismay and terror. Gerlinde felt rough hands laid upon her; there was much hurrying to and fro; a great crowd seemed to collect all at once. She was hustled along. Her resistance was overpowered. Some

one blindfolded her eyes, lest their deadly power should work further evil. She tried to protest; a coarse, cruel hand stopped her mouth. When at last the noise was over, she put up her hands and took off the bandage, to find herself alone in the Hexenthurm* under the castle. She was not fettered, not from goodwill on the part of those who had pushed her into the cell, but because the only hands which understood the locks and bolts of the fetters were tied and bound by her spells. She was faint, weary, and dazed; she could not rouse herself to reflect, or to surmise the consequences of her fatal inspiration. The one idea which formulated itself in her mind was, that the saint had given her a sign after all—had branded her with a stigma which cut her off from all her fellow-creatures. All that night she lay, more asleep than awake, on the straw which formed the prisoner's bed, in the corner of the damp, reeking cell.

Meanwhile, Hans had slept out his magnetic sleep, and had awaked full of awe at the remembrance of what had befallen him.

"Ah me!" he kept repeating. "It is not that I love her any longer, but my heart will never let my hands pile the faggots round the stake for Gerlinde."

"Why not?" said his mother. "Thou should'st thank Heaven that we found it out in time to save thee from being her husband."

In the village there was great excitement. Every one had always known that Gerlinde would show her mother's nature some day; otherwise, why had she those large, bright-brown eyes and those swift, ready gestures? The trial would, of course, be after the Kirmesse. No one could expect Master Weber to postpone his pleasure to his duty on the occasion of his only son's return. When the fatted calf had turned into cold veal, and when the fires of Saint Walpurga had burnt out to cold and black ashes, the trial of the witch and her subsequent punishment would be an exciting event to look forward to.

All this Bruno Weber heard as he and his father sat that evening in the "Golden Hirsch," drinking healths in Westphalian beer. The man of law had much to say on the matter; his painful duty was quite clear to him, and all the voices backed his judgement. But young Master Weber held his peace. In learned Leipzig he had

caught glimpses of several things in heaven and earth which did not form part of the philosophy of his native village. He did not speak of them, however, because he knew that no man is a prophet to his brethren; but he cogitated on some plan for the efficacious defence of that noble-faced maiden, whose eyes, so far from being full of evil, had seemed to him the purest and truest in the world. There were, he knew, great lawyers and churchmen—Christian Thomasius, in Leipzig, for instance—who condemned the trials for so-called witchcraft. Before Gerlinde was brought out of prison to answer the accusation against her, he would find means of communicating with some of these great champions of the cause of humanity, who would gladly raise their voices in her behalf.

Gerlinde, in her damp cell, had no glimmer of any such hope of delivery; yet her courage rose when morning dawned. A kindly sunbeam looked significantly at her through the grating, and she ate with relish the breakfast of black bread which was pushed by an invisible person through a square aperture in the massive door.

As the day wore on, her gleam of courage passed with the sunbeam, and she sat vacantly watching the heavy door, which she would never pass until she was led out first to condemnation, and then to execution. At last as evening drew near there were footsteps and voices on the stones outside. The key turned in the lock; some one was coming in. Her heart throbbed; if it were Hans could she not work on his pity to screen her escape? But Hans had too vivid a recollection of what had befallen him to trust himself in her dangerous presence again. When the door rolled back on its hinges it was Father Paul who entered the cell, carrying his crucifix uplifted with one hand and a phial of holy water in the other.

"My daughter," he said, with stern compassion, "your sin has been great, you have left the flock and gone astray; your punishment, I fear, is inevitable, but Holy Church does not forsake you as you have forsaken her. I come to exhort you to penitence, and humble confession, while yet there is time given you."

It was a long time before the signal was given that the priest's ministrations were over. As Hans reopened the door for his exit, he gave a hasty glance into the cell; there, half kneeling, half crouching on the straw bed, was Gerlinde. Father Paul

* Witches' dungeon.

seemed agitated; he had drawn his cowl over his face and was praying earnestly in a tremulous whisper.

No sound of the Kirmesse penetrated to the dungeon; but as the priest passed the castle gateway in the fading sunset light, the noisy merriment seemed to be at its height. Every one was in the marketplace, or hastening thither; those whom he met only saluted him hastily; his importance was lost sight of in the more urgent importance of getting plenty of amusement.

One man, however, who had been lingering near the gateway, followed him a few steps, then, failing to attract his attention, plucked his sleeve.

"Father," he said. "You promised to give me some account of your visit to the prisoner."

It was Bruno Weber who spoke. The priest did not turn his head.

"My son," he said, "I cannot speak with you now—or here." His voice was hoarse and strange, as though he had gone through great agitation. He strode on, clasping his crucifix close to his breast, and murmuring prayers with ever-increasing earnestness.

"Did you tell her, good sir," Bruno began again, keeping up with him, "that I am undertaking measures to save her?"

The priest started visibly, slackened his steps for a moment, then strode on again, without interrupting his prayer. Bruno frowned impatiently, and followed him until they had reached the glade in which the chapel stood. There the cowed figure halted, and said in the same subdued voice:

"Return, my son, I will speak with none, to-night."

"Nay, father," protested Bruno, "you gave me your promise; and I cannot leave you until I know whether or not you gave Gerlinde my message."

His companion turned towards him in silence; the last ray of the after-glow fell first on the thick folds of the cowl, and then on the face from which he slowly drew it back.

Bruno Weber gave an amazed cry, then springing forward, he seized the hands which held the crucifix.

"Gerlinde!" he cried. "It is not really you?"

"Yes," she replied, in a whisper, "it is Gerlinde—you desire her safety, do you not say? Then leave me here and keep my secret."

"I cannot leave you here, like this," he

answered, still holding her hands; "nor can I keep your secret until you have told it me. I have no faith in witchery, yet, to see you here and in this dress, makes me almost believe in something of the sort."

"It is no witchcraft," cried the girl, simply and earnestly. "Could a witch hold this crucifix to her breast as I do, and say the holy prayers I have said as I came along? Would Heaven have let a witch escape as I have escaped?"

"Nay, Gerlinde, I know you are no witch; but tell me how you escaped. It was not Hans who helped you?"

Gerlinde shook her head. "When Father Paul came to me, with the rood and the holy water," she said, "it came into my mind that a witch's power is said to forsake her in the presence of the cross; and, therefore, if I could bewitch Father Paul, as my mother bewitched old Martin, and as I bewitched Hans yesterday, I should prove that I had no dealings with Satan. So I fixed my eyes on his and raised my hands; the strength that arose in me bade him yield, and I saw his face change as Hans's face changed, and I knew I had prevailed. Then a great fear seized me; for I saw that though I was sure myself that Satan had not helped me, I was in greater peril than before. Then I thought it would be possible to take the Father's cowl and cassock, and give him my skirt and apron and cap, and leave him there while I got away. He obeyed me as a little child obeys, and I took his crucifix and gave Hans the signal to open. To-morrow they will find him in my cell; there will be a terrible outcry. You must not tell them you have seen me, till I have had time to get far away."

"Nay," said Bruno, "you cannot escape without help. You must let me help you. We will start for Leipzig to-night; there, even if they find you, they shall not lay a finger on you, if you will give me the right to protect you."

Gerlinde looked at him with wondering joy.

"Is it because you are so clever," she asked, "that you are so good to poor outcasts?"

"I am good to you, Gerlinde," he replied, drawing her closer to him, "because I want you to love me as I began to love you the moment I saw you; and from this day, all outcasts will be sacred to me, through what you have suffered."

And all that night of haste and weariness

ness they bore with them that foretaste of Paradise which is bestowed on those whose hearts are anchored in the golden depths of first love.

When Gerlinde's escape, and the means by which she had effected it, became known, the excitement in Vollmarstein passed all bounds; the long and learned explanation of the matter which Bruno Weber sent from Leipzig, a few weeks later, only aggravated the rancour of public opinion.

Father Paul, however, took a view of the strange events which partly coincided with Gerlinde's own. He declared that a spell could only work, in the presence of the holy emblem of the Passion, by some mysterious dispensation of Providence. More than once he alluded to the long-forgotten curse pronounced by Gerlinde's mother on himself and Arnold Weber. Whether it was this spiritual trouble which exhausted his mind, or whether the night in the damp cell had undermined the old man's already worn-out physique, it is certain that, from the moment of his awakening from his trance, his strength failed him, and before the summer was over he lay buried under a stone on which was carved, by his own desire, "God is a righteous Judge."

Years afterwards, when Master Arnold Weber's busy path in life had led him down to the brink of the grave, he recalled certain words which the priest on his death-bed had summoned him to hear, but to which anger and mortification at his son's conduct had closed his ears; and in obedience to those long-disregarded exhortations, he sent a gracious answer to Gerlinde's oft-repeated petition for her husband's forgiveness.

WITH THE REGIMENT.

By FREDERICK TALBOT.

It was not an unprecedented thing, but still it gave Captain Oswald Preston a little annoyance, that his young wife should have fancies of her own as to their children's names. The first of their progeny was a girl who must be called Ruby; the next was also of the feminine gender, and received the name of Beryl.

Unfortunately, in neither of the above cases did the girls, as they grew up, correspond to the promises presumed to have been made by their brilliant sponsors. Ruby, who ought from analogy

to have been splendid and Titianesque, turned out a dark and sallow little woman, bright and clever, and gifted with invaluable common-sense. Beryl, on the other hand, with her fluffy hair, her blue eyes, and complexion of milk and roses, had more of the sapphire in her composition. These girls, born in the regiment, and familiar from earliest childhood with barracks, cantonments, and country quarters, took kindly to the military profession, and eventually married soldiers.

There was a son, too; and he also took kindly to that part of the duties of a cavalry soldier which relates to pig-sticking, hunting, steeple-chasing, or rough-riding. But as for military treatises, mathematics, the languages of Greece and Rome, and those other hard matters which, like so many dragons, guard the entrance to Sandhurst or Woolwich, our young Jacynth would have none of them.

Yes; Mrs. Preston had carried out her whim as to nomenclature even in the case of her boy, and had given him a name under which he fretted not a little in after life. But as everybody had always called, and ever did call him Jack, it was very seldom that his name gave him much inconvenience.

Finally, after many years' respite from maternal cares, Mrs. Preston gave birth to a pretty little soft white nestling in the way of a baby girl, whom she at once enthusiastically named Pearl. And this time the Colonel—by force of promotion—objected nothing. A pearl was not a stone, after all; and there was something in the soft and glowing purity of this new blessing of his graver years, that harmonised, so thought the Colonel, very well with the name.

Mrs. Preston did not live to see her Pearl develop the promise of her childhood. She died in India, bequeathing her treasures—that is to say, her husband and her children—to the care of her oldest and dearest friend, one Jane Symonds, of Claverling Park.

"When I am gone, you are to marry Jane," she had often told her husband in those latter days—a course he had always indignantly repudiated. But in the end all had come to pass as his wife had planned.

After her death the mainspring of his life seemed to be gone. He gave up his command to return to England on furlough; and, when that expired, he retired from the service with the rank of Major-General.

Always when in England Clavering Park had been a second home to him. His children had spent their holidays there when their parents were abroad. And in marrying Jane Symonds there would be only a continuation and completion of his former life.

On her part, Miss Symonds had always looked upon Oswald Preston as her ideal of a man; and had perhaps at times, in her lonely state, envied her friend's happiness. And although a practical woman in every-day life, yet she had her sentimental side, and she had been touched at the trust confided to her by her friend's last wishes, "To look after Oswald and the children. He will be lost and helpless without some one to look after him."

The marriage came about in a quiet, undemonstrative way. There had previously arisen a question of settlements. Jane Symonds had come into the Clavering estate under her uncle's will, and she could dispose of it as she pleased. But she felt herself bound by a kind of moral obligation in the matter. If there were no children of the marriage, the estate should go back to the Symonds' family. The General, himself, pronounced that this was only right, and the old-fashioned country lawyers, who were the hereditary guardians of the Symonds' title-deeds, held a similar and even a stronger opinion upon the point. And a good old-fashioned settlement was prepared, by which, failing issue of the marriage, the lands would pass, at the death of General Preston and his wife, to one John Symonds and his heirs—people whom Jane Symonds had always detested. But still duty is duty.

Old John Symonds died a few days after the wedding, and thus his son, generally known as Dick Symonds, became heir presumptive. During his father's lifetime Dick had been, so to say, under a cloud—ugly stories had been whispered about him—but now he blossomed forth into something in the way of a man of fashion in the neighbouring watering-place of Overmere. Dick was a fresh-coloured, foxy-looking man, and, being a bachelor, with means of his own, and greater future expectations, he was a good deal respected in the neighbourhood.

As time went on, Mrs. Preston found the charge she had assumed, of the General and his children, a little trying. The two elder girls, indeed, were quickly married; but Jack remained on hand, and Pearl,

although a very loveable creature, had a will of her own, and was inclined to mutiny at the stricter discipline of her stepmother.

Jack, again, in his way, gave a good deal of trouble. His father had set his heart upon his getting a commission in the Army; but the youth was a difficult subject to cram for his examinations. He struggled with much difficulty through his "preliminary," but stuck altogether at the final. Then was tried the easier passage through the Militia, and Jack was presently gazetted to the third, or militia battalion of the Blankshire Fencibles, whose head-quarters were at Overmere. Jack joined with great glee for the period of training, and made, according to general repute, a very smart subaltern.

In that regiment Dick Symonds was Captain, and very kindly took up the young man a good deal, and initiated him into all the evil ways of the neighbourhood. Also, he introduced the youth into his own club, where play was high and deep. But then Dick, as everybody said, was always trying to dissuade the boy from playing high; and when his advice was disregarded, and heavy losses followed, Dick had come forward in the handsomest way to draw him out of the scrape: that is to say, he introduced him to people who lent him money, became his security for advances, and, when his promises to pay were not redeemed, took the bills up himself and saved the youth from further exposure.

Then, however, Dick put the bills in his pocket, and rode over to Clavering Park and asked to see Mrs. Preston. Long years had elapsed since he had visited Clavering Park. Years ago he had been forbidden the house in consequence of some youthful escapade; but, after all, Dick was a blood relation, and the heir to all the broad lands of the Symonds's, so that Mrs. Preston received him graciously enough. Dick was gifted with a soft, persuasive voice and impressive manner; and when he set forth how he had heard of the scrape into which Jack had got, and had saved the family credit by redeeming him from the hands of the Philistines, Mrs. Preston began to think that she had been wrong in her opinion of Cousin Dick, and that he was, after all, a manly, warm-hearted fellow. She insisted upon paying Jack's liabilities out of her own private purse, and was especially grateful to Symonds for not going to the General about the matter.

Having established a footing at Clavering Park, Dick Symonds soon became a favourite there. The General liked him well enough. Jack looked up to him as a guide, philosopher, and friend; and Pearl gave him a frank, girlish friendship, that was especially grateful to his mind. For it was for her sake that he had taken all the risk and trouble to ingratiate himself with the people at the Park. Her simple, ingenuous charm inspired him with the strongest passion he had ever experienced.

In spite of Captain Symonds' care and trouble, Jack continued to get into scrapes; and before long he gave the coup de grâce to his prospects by falling in love with the pretty daughter of a neighbouring gamekeeper, and by marrying her one fine day at the office of the registrar of the district.

Jack was now of age, and could do as he pleased; but the General refused to recognise in any way the newly married pair. He sent his son a hundred pounds, telling him that it was all he need look for in the way of inheritance. He altered his will, cutting out his son altogether from its provisions, and tried to appear as if he had dismissed the whole affair from his mind.

Jack had one secret interview with his sister Pearl, in which he told her that he was the happiest fellow in the world, and that his little Amy was worth all the sacrifices he had made for her. He was going to London, where he meant to find fame and fortune in some, as yet, undiscovered way. Pearl was broken-hearted at losing her brother, who was still more than ever a hero in her eyes for having braved the opinions of the world for love's sake. She gave him all her store—five pounds, and a crooked sixpence with a hole in it, which he promised always to wear for her sake, and so he departed, promising to write as soon as he had any good news to communicate.

Nothing more was heard from Jack himself. But, about a year after his departure, it was known in the neighbourhood that his wife had died in giving birth to her first child. Pearl wept over the poor thing's sad fate. Still the hope arose that Jack would now come back to them. And there was still time for Jack to get his commission, if he set to work at once.

Indeed, since Jack's departure, an event had occurred which would give a roseate

hue to his future prospects. Another Symonds had died, an eccentric and miserly character, who had, to everybody's surprise, left behind him a large fortune, which he had bequeathed to his niece, Jane, as "the only respectable member of the family." Mrs. Preston openly avowed her intention of bequeathing the windfall to the two persons whom, after her husband, of course, she held in most affection—that is to say, to Jack and Pearl.

Captain Symonds had been wild with rage when he heard of his kinswoman's legacy. It ought to have come to him, and would have been of infinitely more value to him than a succession that he might never live to enjoy. But he concealed his feelings successfully when at Clavering, and he volunteered in the most friendly way to go in search of Jack, and bring him back to the bosom of his family. The Captain spent some weeks in London, but returned with the report of a fruitless quest.

And now Captain Symonds began in earnest to make his court to pretty Pearl. He had certain advantages on his side. Even his years—he owned to thirty-five, and was perhaps a little older—he did not think were much against him, for a young girl is often more flattered by the preference of one of mature years than of some one she looks upon as a mere boy. And then the girl liked him well enough already, and her stepmother was not exactly hostile to his pretensions. For Captain Dick had been very much on his good behaviour lately, and rumours of former evil deeds had become faint and undefined.

And, after all, it would be pleasant to have Pearl continuing to live among them, and to think of her as the future châtelaine. But there was a rival in the field, one who had sprung up like a mushroom in the most unexpected fashion.

Only a few months ago the Government had put in repair some tumble-down old forts in the neighbourhood of Overmere, and had sent down a detachment of Artillery to garrison them. And the Lieutenant in command of the detachment proved to be an old fellow-pupil of Jack's, who had passed into the Artillery, and who renewed an acquaintance formerly made with the household at Clavering Park.

And between young Arthur Russel of the Artillery, and Captain Symonds of the Militia, there arose a mutual distrust and

dislike which could hardly be attributed to professional jealousy. As for Pearl, although perplexed and troubled by the evident rivalry of the two men, she began to find that her friendship for her older admirer was becoming pale and faint in comparison with the interest inspired by the new wooer. And yet, whenever there was a question between the two, she gave Captain Symonds the preference.

At last there arrived news of Jack Preston—not directly, but through enquiries made by Captain Symonds. It was pretty well established that, shortly after his wife's death, he had enlisted in the Sixtieth Dragoons, the General's old regiment, under the name of John Diamond. The regiment was now somewhere on the Nile, forming part of Lord Wolseley's force. Mrs. Preston was for sending Cousin Symonds off at once to find him out, purchase his freedom—as she expressed it—and bring him home.

But the General would not hear of this. To desert his colours in the presence of an enemy would be impossible to a son of his. No; let Jack win his spurs, and when the campaign was over, let them see what could be done for him. The General even forbade any of his family to write to poor Jack.

But from that time it was noticed that the old soldier looked braver and better than he had ever done since Jack's departure. He scanned all the reports from the army abroad with increased interest, and painfully studied the occasional lists of casualties.

In spite of her father's prohibition, Pearl determined to write to her brother. He should know that there were people at home who still loved him, and were longing to see him again. But it was not an easy matter at Clavering Park to smuggle out such a letter. The General supervised the postal arrangements with something of military rigour. A special messenger took the letter-bag every evening to the nearest post town, and before he left the General always turned out the letters, counted them, and assured himself that they were properly stamped, and a letter in Pearl's handwriting with such a remarkable address as Private John Diamond, Sixtieth Dragoons, British Expeditionary Force, and so on, would be sure to attract his attention; and to ask a servant to post a letter surreptitiously was too humiliating. But there was Captain Symonds at hand, who was in her con-

fidence as to Jack, and who was only too ready to help her in this matter.

But Captain Symonds made such a mystery of the business, that poor Pearl was soon conscious that she had placed herself in a false position. It had been such a simple affair, too, in the beginning. Pearl had been walking with Captain Symonds in the garden with some other guests, when she had slipped Jack's letter into his hands—with the hurried request, "Direct this and post it for me, please; it is for Jack." He ought to have understood the whole thing in a moment.

There was some one else, however, who thought he understood the whole thing, and was almost broken-hearted at the discovery. Arthur Russel had seen the rapid delivery of the letter, and he came to the natural conclusion that there was a surreptitious correspondence between Pearl and the handsome, unscrupulous Dick Symonds. Poor Russel went back to his dwelling by the sad sea-shore, full of grief and rage. And yet he had no right to interfere; he could not even punish that intriguing rascal, Symonds. He could only avoid the girl for the future, and, as soon as he could, exchange into some other battery far away from his faithless Pearl. By a wonderful stroke of good-fortune, as he thought, he was able to effect his purpose. An artillery relief was going out, the subaltern in charge of which was incapacitated by a dangerous accident. Russel's application coming in at the right moment was acceded to, and he was ordered out to Egypt. He had only time for one hurried call at Clavering Park. He saw Pearl but for a moment; there was sorrow and disappointment he thought in her eyes, dark and suffused. But he looked and spoke in his coldest, driest manner. It was good-bye, and for ever.

In the privacy of her own room Pearl gave herself up to uncontrollable grief. Now that he had gone, she felt that she had, unasked, given young Russel her heart, and he had left her in coldness and evident anger.

But as time went on and no news came from the young artilleryman; and, considering the kindness shown him at Clavering Park, he might have written to Mrs. Preston and kept alive his acquaintance with the family; looking to this blank silence, Pearl began to think that really she had been deceived, and that Arthur Russel was one of those typical soldier lovers who love and ride away. And Cousin Dick

was always at hand, always tender and devoted—too much devoted, indeed, for his confidential interviews, his mysterious asides, and the heartfelt way in which he threw around her his protection and devotion when they walked, or rode abroad together. And people began to say openly, "Of course she will marry Dick Symonds—everybody can see that all that is arranged." But the general sentiment, if expressed with equal candour, would have been rather of compassion than congratulation for the object of Dick Symonds' devotion.

Such was the state of affairs one fine spring morning, when General Preston suggested, at breakfast, that his daughter should accompany him for a ride over the downs to a little market town, where he had some business to transact. Mrs. Preston pronounced that the ride would do the girl good; and Pearl assented submissively rather than enthusiastically. The girl was looking a little pale and thin. But then the winter had been long and trying, and on the whole depressing. The troops were returning from the East, but nothing had been heard of Jack—and not a word had come from the young gunner.

The day was fine and open as the General and Pearl rode away over the downs and across the valley into the wild, broken, fuzzy country beyond. Great fleecy clouds were sailing majestically over head, sunshine and shadow chased each other over the wide landscape, while everywhere the subdued voice of spring thrilled the inner sense with a feeling of pathetic joy and expectancy.

Beyond the brow of the hill stretched a wide and broken plateau, tufted here and there with plantations, and rising to a gaunt and massive headland which even the sunshine did not brighten much, and which looked dark, and gloomy, and louring in the shade.

Across the flank of the headland zig-zagged a white thread of a road, which took a more direct course across the waste and broadened out into two wide margins of greensward with a narrow strip of Macadamite formation between. Here had once been a noted coach road, enlivened by a constant succession of post-chaises, carriages, and mail-coaches; but it now, in a general way, was as lonely and deserted as any road could be in a civilised country.

To-day, however, there was a stir of something on the road. In the distance

dark masses glided almost imperceptibly along with a faint, metallic murmur, while every now and then radiant points of brightness flashed out like lightning from a thunder cloud. Points of colour, too, were scattered here and there; and the sandy common gave out a hollow, quaking sound, as if gathered legions were tramping about in its subterranean caves. Then a trumpet rang out, and the whole array was spread out in a different fashion, becoming almost invisible in the dazzle and glitter. Here was some cavalry regiment on the march—a sight not very familiar now; but one that had often enough been seen on that old road when there was fighting going on in Spain or in France.

"It is my old regiment," said the General, as he drew up where a little stone bridge covered a lazy stream that filtered through the waste.

"It is Jack's regiment," cried Pearl, as the leading vedettes came in sight with carbines unslung, and the sun glinting bravely on brass helmets and steel accoutrements.

"Nobody knows me now," muttered the General, as officers and men rode by.

But surely if Jack were there he would recognise them, even if he escaped the scrutiny of the lookers-on. But troop after troop passed by, and there was no sign of recognition from the ranks. Again the trumpet rang out as the last files passed the bridge. It was the signal to halt and dismount. Then the General and Pearl rode on, disappointed and sad; and on the other side of the bridge they found that a couple of light transport waggons had been halted, and on the top of one of these sat a little girl in a red cloak, who looked round upon the scene about her with an air of benevolent interest.

"And whose little girl are you?" asked the General, as they rode up to the cart.

"I am Dot," replied the mite, promptly. "Dot, of the Sixtieth Dragoons."

"And where is your mother, little one?" enquired Pearl.

"Oh, mummy went in the train," said the child, "but Dot must go with the regiment."

"You see, miss, the regiment is more than a mother to her," said a trooper, laughing. "She's all right with us, and knows our ways finely."

The General hauled out a bright sixpence and gave it to Miss Dot, who looked at it doubtfully, and then handed it over to the attendant trooper.

"That will be a drink for you, Turner," she said, condescendingly.

"Yes, Miss Dot," replied the man, chuckling with delight at the child's aplomb.

The General smiled too, but sadly, as he rode on.

Then they came upon the Colonel, who was seated on a hedgebank, discussing a packet of sandwiches.

"I can't stand this suspense any longer," muttered the General.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "for disturbing you at your luncheon, but you have recently arrived from Egypt, I fancy?"

"You are right," replied the Colonel, briskly, still munching his sandwiches; "and delighted we were to get away from that beastly dusthole. And we are marching for Overmere, which I know of old to be pleasant quarters."

"I trust you will still find them so," said the General, politely. "But may I ask if there is in your ranks a young soldier named John Diamond, in whom I take an interest?"

"There was," replied the Colonel, kindly. "One of the best and most gallant soldiers in the regiment."

"There was!" repeated the General, with a break in his voice.

"Yes; for I am sorry to say he was knocked on the head in a skirmish. He was down in the lists as James Drummond, by the way; but that did not matter, for the other was an assumed name."

"Thank you," replied the General, retaining his composure. "He was my son. A gallant soldier, I think you said. You have made me very proud, Colonel."

The General galloped off, and Pearl and the belted groom tried in vain to keep up with him. At last he drew up, and turned a white face towards his daughter.

"Your brother Jack is gone, dear," he said, "but he died like a soldier, and we won't grieve."

There was no fuse made about the matter at Clavering Park; but the General fretted a good deal in secret, and Pearl wept often over the fate of her brother. And Dick Symonds proved wonderfully sympathetic and kind, always making the most of poor Jack's good qualities, and lamenting his untimely fate. Pearl began to think that if she must marry somebody who was not the man of her choice, it would be better to fall in with family arrangements and take to Dick Symonds and Clavering Park.

Her stepmother urged her to make up her mind, for now that Jack was gone, she was anxious to settle her affairs once for all. Captain Symonds, too, urged his suit with remarkable ardour and pertinacity.

With Clavering Park in reversion, and the Symonds' money in possession through his wife, the Captain flattered himself that he would have been even with the Preston family, whom he had always regarded as "pernicious interlopers." Of course, he excepted his future wife from this judgement; but then she should become a Symonds of the original brand, or he would know the reason why.

Hitherto, Clavering Park had held itself aloof from the military at Overmere Barracks. But now that the General's old regiment was quartered there, there was every reason to be civil to it; and Mrs. Preston before long drove over to call on the officers' wives, and she took Pearl with her. When they had finished their round, they were driving past the barrack gates, when Pearl espied, issuing forth, the little girl in the red cloak whom she had seen on the transport waggon not long before. She looked so small in contrast with the big barrack gates, and yet she was so entirely dignified and self-possessed as she followed in the footsteps of a stout, motherly woman, who was hurrying along with a basket!

"Dot, Dot!" cried Pearl, stopping the carriage. "Dot, come here!"

"What does you want with Dot?" said the child with dignity, "Dot's busy."

But the motherly body turned, and, taking the child in her arms, brought her to the carriage.

"She's a dear little thing, ain't she?" said Mrs. Sergeant Brown, "and quite the life of the regiment. But she ain't my child, though I'm just as fond of her. She's an orphan like, anyhow, her mother's dead and her father," sinking her voice, "left almost for dead in the hospital."

"Come with me, Dot," cried Pearl, holding out her arms.

But Dot clung to her "mummy," and could not be persuaded to leave her.

"You must bring Miss Dot to see us," said Mrs. Preston smiling, and she gave Mrs. Sergeant Brown her card and drove away.

Not long after a mounted trooper rode up to the hall door at Clavering Park, with a despatch. It was from Mrs. Brown, informing the ladies that little Dot was

very ill with a feverish attack, and that she was continually talking about the "pretty lady," and wanting to see her; and if one of the ladies would kindly come and see the child, Mrs. Brown would be very grateful. Pearl said at once that she would go.

"But if it is something infectious?" objected Mrs. Preston.

"Then I will be disinfected before I come home," said Pearl resolutely.

There was quite a subdued air over the barracks that day. The trumpet-calls were performed in dumb show. Stalwart dragoons, with pails and brushes, stepped softly across the barrack square, and the usual clatter and chatter was hushed, and the whole regiment held its breath as it were as the life of little Dot hung in the balance. Pearl was ushered quietly into the bare little barrack-room, where the child was tossing in her narrow crib, her wavy hair tumbled in disorder upon the pillow, and the brilliance of fever in her great dark eyes.

"Here's the pretty lady come to see you, dear," said Mrs. Brown, and the child seized upon Pearl's cool, white hand and pressed it to her flushed and fevered cheeks.

"Pretty lady," whispered the child, "Dot wants her daddie. Bring Dot her daddie."

"I wish I could, darling," said Pearl.

"It's the way with 'em," said Mrs. Brown, rather vexed, "when they've got one thing they want another."

But the child still repeated her cry:

"Pretty lady, bring Dot her daddie."

"I will bring him if I can, Dot," said Pearl.

But the child seemed pacified by thus much assurance, and presently fell into a troubled sleep, still holding firmly by Pearl's hand, who dared scarcely move a muscle for fear of waking her. But as little Dot tossed uneasily on her pillow, her little nightgown flew open, and there, about the little round throat, hung by a silver cord a crooked sixpence. Pearl stooped to examine the coin, and then raised her head with a smothered cry:

"This is Jack's child. It must be; there is the crooked sixpence I gave him when he went away."

For several hours slept little Dot; her rest becoming more calm and peaceful as she slept, with Pearl's hand held tightly in her little fist.

"She's taken a turn, miss," said Mrs.

Brown, joyfully, as the child awoke with a calmer light in her round, wondering eyes.

As Pearl drove home, full of the wonderful news about Jack's child, she met Cousin Dick half-way, who was riding over to see what had become of her. But in the manner in which he received Pearl's announcement of her discovery, Captain Symonds, for the first time, disclosed the cloven hoof.

"Jack's child—nonsense!" he screamed, half beside himself with rage. "Some impostor set up to rob us. Jack is dead and his brat, too!"

"You wretch!" cried Pearl, indignantly; and the Captain, losing all self control, galloped off, blaspheming horribly, and whipping and spurring his horse in his blind rage.

Pearl was astounded at the man's manner and bearing. The character he had unconsciously revealed filled her with disgust. And he had always pretended to be such a friend to Jack. His love for her was of the same quality as his friendship, no doubt. But after the first ebullition of his wrath, Captain Symonds became more calm. He saw the mistake he had made, and next morning he presented himself at Clavering Park, prepared to humble himself in the dust as far as apologies were concerned. But the doors no longer flew open for him. Mrs. Preston was "not at home," and the General and Miss Preston had left the night before for Egypt.

The scene changes to hot and dusty Cairo. But it is cool enough in the wards of the military hospital, almost deserted now, for only a few serious and tedious cases remain in the charge of a solitary surgeon. Along the silent marble corridors echo the steps of a couple of men in undress uniform; one is the hospital surgeon, and the other a young artillery officer, who had come to visit one of his men.

"I should be packing-up, too, in a day or two," said the surgeon. "My worst case was a sergeant in the Sixtieth Dragoons, and he is well enough to move. What do you say, sergeant," he asked, approaching a bed that was placed pleasantly enough under a verandah, "what do you say to England, home, and beauty?"

The sergeant, who was sitting, half-reclining, on the bed, smiled faintly: "It's all right, if I can join the regiment, that's my home now, and there's my child, too; and she is a beauty, I can tell you."

"Why, Jack!" said the gunner, "Jack Preston."

"Arthur Russel, by Jove!" said the invalid, holding out his hand. And the two friends sat side by side on the camp-bedstead, talking over all that happened since they last met, while the surgeon went on to look after his other patients. Delighted was Jack to hear of Clavering Park, of his father, and Sister Pearl. "I have only had one little bit of a letter since I have been out here," he said, "and that was from Pearl. The gov'nor wouldn't let anybody write to me; but Pearl managed to get one away, by getting Dick Symonds to forward it."

Arthur Russel flushed to the forehead.

"Jack, do you know the date of that letter?" he cried.

Yes, Jack knew the date; in fact, here was the letter, and Arthur might read it. There were no secrets.

Arthur handled the letter tenderly, reverently. Dear little Pearl had written it. How he had wronged her. Yes, it was written on the very day on which he had first misjudged her; a little, loving letter, and at the end a scrawl to say that this would be sent through Cousin Dick, and that Jack must write to his care.

"And did you write?" asked Arthur, curiously.

"Oh, yes," said Jack; "told 'em all about my enlisting. I and Bob Carew joined the same day—he as Jack Diamond, and I as Bill Hyacinth. And, of course, I told them all about Dot—my little girl, you know."

Any further confidences were interrupted by the slight bustle attending a new arrival. "Visitors for the sahib," cried a black attendant, showing a grinning face in the doorway.

Jack rose, pale and excited, from his couch. His father stood before him, the old General pale, too, and shaking.

"My dear boy," he gasped, "my dear Jack, you are to come home."

And then Jack wept like a child upon his father's shoulder.

"And Jack," whispered Pearl, who had hold of his disengaged hand, "we have got Dot; and I have promised to bring home her daddie."

And so it happened that the whole party joined the next P. and O. steamer at Alexandria, and were presently steaming across the Mediterranean; Jack recovering health and strength in the soft sea breezes, and Arthur Russel and Pearl exchanging confidences in snug recesses of the poop. Some unfeeling prigs, indeed,

objected to the presence of the sergeant's stripes in the saloon of the steamer. But to such objectors the General had a ready answer in his pocket, where he always carried a copy of a recent "London Gazette."

"Sixtieth Royal Dragoons, Sergeant Jacynth Preston to be Lieutenant, vice Perkins who retires; promoted for gallantry in the field."

As for Cousin Dick, finding that his plans had all failed, and in desperate straits—for he had squandered all his own fortune and could not raise a farthing on the possible reversion of Clavering Park—he first took to a heavy fit of drinking, and under the influence of that, and what we may hope was his remorse for having suppressed Jack's letters, he shot himself one morning, just after he had heard of the return of the travellers to Clavering Park. As he was the last of the family, Mrs. Preston's marriage settlement was now void, and she could bestow the estate where she pleased.

As for Dot, she recovered speedily her health and spirits, and was ready to greet her daddie with great delight on his return. The young lady now lives part of the year with grandpapa at Clavering, and is often with Aunt Pearl, who has joined the Artillery, and who, in accordance with the motto of that corps, is here, there, and everywhere. But the great delight of Miss Dot is still to be "with the Regiment."

TWO AND ONE.

By B. DEMPSTER.

Author of "*A Man's Friends*," "*For Sweet Charity*," "*Through Gates of Gold*," etc. etc.

CHAPTER I.

FAR off, on the mysterious, inaccessible summits of the mountains, deep down in cavernous gorges, on the bare, bleak sides of granite precipices, the awful silences of fallen snow and ice-bound waters were broken. Great avalanches, awaking dull, thundering echoes, crashed down from mighty heights into chasms where the feet of men had never trod. There was the plunge and the roar of waters as the mountain-torrents, swollen by the melting snows, tumbled foaming into rivers so green and lucid that the stones of their bed could be seen from the bank. It was early yet in the year; but spring had come. In England there were daffodils and primroses in hedge-lined

lanes and fields ; here, there was only the pale, tender glint of new green, as spruce and pine clad themselves in their fresh spring robes, and the wonderful tints of the mosses. The air was sharp and cold ; but sweet and invigorating. There is no atmosphere in Europe to surpass the air of Norway. Still, it was very cold. The sky was grey overhead, as if threatening more snow. A stolkjaerre was driving, at rather an unusual speed for Norwegian ponies, along the road that skirted the precipitous side of the Romsdalen. Two human beings, muffled up in furs, occupied the stolkjaerre. One was tall, powerfully built, with the strength and decision of a giant in appearance ; and in manner, the meekness and deference of a thoroughly crushed school-boy. This was the "he." The other was slender, delicate-faced, with the most perfectly feminine grace of manner and appearance, lovely-eyed, and sweet-mouthed ; but with the imperious will of a queen, and the bewildering spirit of a woman. This "she" was silent now ; but she had been very cross, very unreasonable, very incomprehensible. She had been angry with him for having brought her ; and yet it had been only at her imperious insistence that he had consented to drive her from Naes, where she had been spending the winter on the Romsdalen Fjord, to Stueflaaten, after which, with a sudden caprice, she had longed.

He himself had arrived at Naes — a perfect stranger to her — three weeks before. He was a Norwegian, she an Englishwoman. He was young, and she was younger. She was beginning to feel unutterably dull and depressed. Now that the long monotony and dreariness of winter were over, she had begun to wonder how it was she had not gone mad before the spring came.

The people of the station had been very good to her all the winter. But they had not been companions in the true sense of the word.

She had felt that it was so when this young man, with his chivalrous devotion, his keen, cultivated intellect, his generous enthusiasms, his strength, his impatience of all that was petty, and morbid, and base, came suddenly into the monotonous, still life she was living. They had, in those few weeks, become very good friends. Though, if their intercourse had been measured by mere hours or days, it would not have counted for much, for he spent most of his time out-of-doors.

But they met, naturally, as they were living in the same house, every day, either for meals or for some short period. They had taken one or two walks together ; and it was in answer to a sudden outburst of hers that he had suggested that she should leave Naes for a little and go on to Stueflaaten.

They had had a long day's journey, leaving the fjord early that morning. It was now nearly five in the afternoon, and he was afraid she was worn out. From Ormeim, the last station at which they had stopped to change horses, he had driven hard and fast. The valley along which they had come was magnificent in its rugged grandeur. In the distance were the everlasting peaks, shrouded in snow. Below them, the Rauma rushed and roared along its stony bed.

"I am afraid you are very cold and tired," he said, after a long silence.

He spoke English with scarcely any accent.

"I am very tired and very cold." Her voice was sweet as music ; but there was a decidedly peevish note in it at this moment. "And don't speak to me. When you do, I have to look up and see the mountains with their awful stillness and white-shrouded faces. I had grown used to them at Naes. Now this is all strange again, and—why did you let me come ?"

He did not understand her in the least. She bewildered him ; but he was a wise man, and attempted no answer.

"Br-r-r," he cried to his pony ; and he had the satisfaction of understanding and being understood here at any rate, for the brave little pony dashed on in obedience to his encouraging cry, as if as anxious to reach Stueflaaten as he himself was.

Their destination came in sight at last. She had been cowering down closer in her furs, and had uttered no word since she last spoke. She did not answer now when he told her that they had arrived. He drove up to the station, and, jumping down, helped her to dismount. An exclamation of alarm broke from him, and, lifting her in his strong arms, he carried her into the house. The mistress of the station came to meet the new arrivals.

"The lady has fainted," he said.

They took her into the nearest room, the young Norwegian still carrying her.

The beautiful, delicate face rested on his breast. He looked down at its deathly whiteness, and his own paled. But, as he laid her on the couch, a faint tremor stirred her. She opened her eyes, and, looking

up, saw him bending over her. For a second she gazed up at him, then the colour rushed back into her face, and she sat swiftly upright.

"Please go away, and leave me alone," she said irritably, but with a shadow of some deeper feeling in her eyes. "Has not my maid arrived yet?" The maid was following with the luggage. "Go and look if you see her coming."

Olaf Ericsson did not return to the room till supper was laid.

When he entered the room, he found her resting on the couch. There was something so exhausted in her attitude, that he went up to her anxiously. But she sat up, and met his disturbed look with a frank, merry laugh.

CHAPTER II.

"How you must have hated me for making such a fuss!" she said. "But it was not the cold and fatigue that hurt me, it was the awful silence and strength of those snow-capped mountains. All life seemed paralysed by them. I could not breathe. I felt in the grasp of a cruel, pitiless power, that was slowly crushing out all my will and individuality. It was the culmination of what I have been feeling all the winter. Those Troid tunderne were slowly sending me mad. And, this afternoon, if you had not been with me, I could not have endured it. But you seemed so strong, too, and you were so good to me."

A great light, like a flame of fire, leaped into his eyes. But she was so moved by the passion which had suddenly swept over her, her eyes were so intent upon some far-off point of view, that she saw nothing so near as the young man by her side. A sudden thought flashed through his brain, that she was gazing back at a past in her life, with which he had nothing to do. She was but a stranger who had crossed his path. He knew absolutely nothing of her life, save those three short weeks just passed.

The fire died from his eyes.

"Let's leave the mountains alone and have supper," he said, in a matter-of-fact tone. "They don't trouble about us."

The note brought her back to the present, with a sudden shame for her self-betrayal. She laughed, though the sound was a little unsteady.

"That's just it. They don't care, and it's that that makes our madness. You

see, if one could only stir them ever so little——"

She stopped. A door behind them opened, and a man came into the room. She looked round at him for a second, her face suddenly growing as passionless and cold as if she, like those mountains, would never be moved again. Then she turned away, and sat down at the table.

The new-comer walked painfully with the aid of sticks. His face was pale and contracted, as if he had gone through some probation of sharp pain. He was a thin, slightly-built man, about the medium height. At the first glance, there was nothing remarkable about him. The second glance made one look again. After that, no one could forget his face—pale, refined, highly intellectual, with strength and indomitable will in every line.

He bowed slightly to the other two, and came, walking slowly and with great difficulty, towards the table. He sat down at the farthest end. Olaf took his place near Mrs. Aylmer. Stewed reindeer, cheese, pancakes, a great jug of cream, formed the meal. The cooking was capital. The best, Mrs. Aylmer said, she had found since landing in Norway. She was decidedly frivolous over her supper. Olaf Ericsson had never yet seen her so light-hearted. He roused himself from a vague depression that had come over him, and fell into her mood.

They had the conversation all to themselves. The other guest at the table sat still and stern, taking no notice of either of them.

Only once he looked up and glanced in a strange, keen way, from the young Norwegian to the beautiful Englishwoman.

"I have never tasted pancakes anywhere like Norwegian pancakes!" said Mrs. Aylmer, laughing. "I begin to think, now, that they were the saving of my reason till you came into my existence, Mr. Ericsson. For three days—when the wind raged, like a hundred giants let loose in the valley, and the snow fell, till we were almost buried—I ate nothing but pancakes. I wasn't frightened. Under other circumstances I should have enjoyed the gale. But, somehow or another, I seemed to give way, mentally and physically, and they had to feed me on pancakes. They said I wouldn't touch anything else. No doubt a light and frivolous diet satisfied the natural bent of my mind."

"What were your friends thinking of, to allow you to come and shut yourself up

a whole winter in a lonely station in the Romsdalen? It was not right."

"My friends had nothing to do with it. I wished to come—and I came. I am free to come and go as I wish."

Once more that vague chill touched him, but it vanished as she laughed softly and kindly again.

"But you only just came in time, Mr. Ericsson. Even pancakes were failing to satisfy me. I did not know what I wanted. Then you arrived, and I found out that I had stayed long enough at Naes, and wanted to move on."

It was at this point, that the man at the other end of the table glanced up. Olaf did not see the glance as he was looking into the lovely, smiling face near him. Mrs. Aylmer did not apparently notice it either, as she continued laughing and talking. But her colour had deepened, and when she arose a few moments later, to leave the table, her cheeks, usually rather too pale, were burning with a beautiful crimson blush, and her eyes almost dazzled the young Norseman with their starry brilliance.

She left the room, and the two men were alone together.

An hour later Ericsson joined her in another room, at the opposite side of the entrance-hall. It was a large, empty apartment, with two doors—one, in the corner, opening into the kitchen. The voices and laughter of the household, at supper there, could be heard. The sounds broke, with a sense of cheerful, simple-hearted life, on the silence and emptiness of this other room.

It was only lighted by the wood fire burning in the great, old-fashioned, Norwegian fire-place. It was built in the corner of the room opposite to the kitchen. The pine logs blazed on a raised stone hearth, standing out into the room. Above it, was the wide, deep chimney. The fitful, leaping flames cast strange shadows on the great rafters overhead, and the bare wooden walls, and shone red on to the motionless figure seated a few feet from the raised stone of the hearth. All the rest of the great, empty room, except just round the corner fire-place, lay in deep shadow. The slender figure in the red, flickering light sat very still.

He stood in the doorway, looking across the room at her. He watched her for a moment or two; then something in the rigid stillness of her attitude filled him with a vague fear—a presentiment of coming

ill. He hurried across the room to her side. She heard him coming, and started up, turning to face him, her eyes full of terror and anger. But it almost seemed as if she had expected some one else, for, as she discovered who it was, the angry repulsion and shrinking vanished. But he had startled her, so that she was trembling from head to foot.

"I could not bear the dining-room, with its stove," she said, trying to speak lightly. "The heat and closeness stifled me. So I came in here."

"They might have given you a light," he said, with a resolute effort stilling the passionate throbbing of his nerves. "You looked like the spirit of some incantation scene, sitting here so still and silent in the red light."

"Suppose we have a light now," she said in her brightest and frankest voice.

He coloured; he knew that she had heard the passionate note that had broken through his attempted matter-of-fact tone.

"All right; I'll tell them," he said, quietly. But he did not seem in a hurry to go. He was thinking how lovely a pretty woman could look in the firelight. Full of this conviction he said the first thing that came into his head. "I can't say much for the manners of our fellow-visitor here, though he is a countryman of your own, Mrs. Aylmer. He's the surliest fellow in the world. I tried to be civil after you left the table; but was never so snubbed in my life. His name is Holland. He came here three weeks ago, and met with a bad accident out shooting. At first they thought it was touch-and-go with his life. But he has pulled through. Not that he seems good for much now. He looks awfully ill, and can scarcely drag himself about. Yet he told me, just as he was going back to his room, that he means to leave here to-morrow. It is the only remark he volunteered to me, and that seemed a kind of after-thought; and I can't for the life of me think why he said it. It's nothing to me if he goes to-morrow or to-night. He's not much acquisition any way."

"Why did you think the remark was an after-thought?"

She had turned to face him, and her back being to the fire, her eyes were in shadow.

"I don't know—except that he had scarcely answered a thing I said. He got up abruptly from the table while I was saying something," he coloured slightly, "about you having been brave enough to

spend a winter alone in Norway. He's a brute!" Savagely recalling something he had seen in the Englishman's face as he spoke of Mrs. Aylmer.

"What made him tell you, then, that he was leaving?"

"Heaven knows! He stopped suddenly just as he was going into his room, and turned round to tell me so. Why, Mrs. Aylmer! What is the matter?"

The blood-red colour had rushed over her face. She put up her hand in a dull, confused kind of way to her head, and swayed unsteadily on her feet. He flung out his arms; but, before he could touch her, she had caught the back of the chair, and, straightening herself, broke into a little constrained laugh.

"The winter has tried me more even than I knew," she said. "It was foolish to come. But I felt that I must get away." She stopped and looked down into the fire again. He watched her face with a searching that was painful in its intentness. Not the breath of a doubt had ever sullied his trust in her; but he had often wondered what had brought her—young, beautiful, alone—to spend the winter in the Norwegian mountains. That there was some mystery, he had suspected. Now he was suddenly sure. And something in the pale, delicate face, the proud mouth, told him that it was a tragedy. He never knew what prompted the impulse. Unless it were the fire that had been kindling in his heart, which suddenly broke through all restraint.

"You came because you were unhappy," he said, in a voice of forced quiet. "And you were unhappy all the time. It was not the white cold and the ice that harmed you! The stillness and strength of the mountains would not have oppressed you. But your life was sorry, and everything hurt you. Even the very loneliness and silence! The very first moment I saw you, I knew you were sad. Even when you laughed I could hear the same note, and to-day you are sadder than ever!"

She looked up at him, startled out of all self-control. She put out her hand as if to stop him. But he went on; the quiet breaking into impetuous passion.

"There have been moments when the terrible pathos of your eyes has been almost more than I could endure. I have longed to ask you to let me do something to help you. It was presumption—madness. But I could not help it. To-night, and all this day—I can't define it—but it

has seemed as if you needed help more than ever. Perhaps it might only mean some one to whom you could say a word—with whom you could exchange a thought. Cannot you trust me? Cannot you feel that I would hold it the grandest honour to be able to serve you in any way? You know nothing of me—but, believe me, I would be to you the truest friend a woman could have. Try me."

"I do trust you," she said, "but I may not accept your friendship—nor that of any man. I have put myself in the position I am in by my own deliberate choice, and I will and must take its consequences. One is that I must live apart from friendship and sympathy such as you offer. Perhaps, if you knew all, you would not offer it. But I will prove my faith in you by this; I will tell you that I am unhappy. My life seems to have been set ajar. Perhaps I have sinned. Do not men say that everything that goes wrong is a woman's fault? But whether I have done wrong or right, I would do as I have done all over again—even though it must cost me the friendship of such men as you! I am unhappy now; but I was a hundredfold more miserable before."

There was a moment's silence. He was very pale. He understood perfectly what she had intended to convey to him. The friendship he had offered to her, was but a disguise for the great, overmastering tumult of feelings which were surging through him. What was their name? He had not known till she had taught him. She had wished to save him from an infinite self-degradation. He had known from the first, that she was not a free woman. How could he have blundered into this awful mistake? Another moment, and the false veil of friendship would have been rent, and the pent-up feelings would have broken into a torrent of passionate words—the deadliest insult he could have done her.

He stood white and dazed for a moment, trembling at the thought of what he might have done.

Then she could bear the look in his eyes no longer, and a low and bitter cry broke from her.

"Oh!" and she stretched out her hands as if in mute appeal for his pardon, "I can see, to-night, that I have made a mistake with my life. It would not matter if our mistakes stopped with ourselves; but they don't. They go out to others and hurt them. I have been proud, and hard, and bitter, and thought of no one but myself—

and my husband. You remember, I told you when I first met you that I had a husband."

It was the only direct allusion she made to the scene that had just passed between them, the under-note of which they had both so well understood.

But the burning blush died quickly away, and she went on again:

"I left my husband last year. My life had become intolerable to me. If I could have thought for an instant that it was hard for him, I would have stayed. But he did not care. It was nothing to him how I suffered. He was hard, cold, merciless. He believed that women were to be but the reflection of men. He lived his life, and thought it sufficient for me to live in his house, sit at his table, be fed and clothed by his hand. I was to have no will of my own, no mind of my own. If I reproached him, he did not understand. He was so strong, so cold, so self-contained, that he could feel no need in his life that I could fill. Besides, he believed that women had their place, and should keep to it, and that place was only the outside court to the men's holy of holies! Men could come, if they chose, into that outer court, but no woman's foot must press the sacred precincts of their inner life! And yet he loved me once."

Her eyes took a lonely, dreamy expression, and she stopped a moment, and looked down into the fire. She seemed to have forgotten the young Norwegian. He saw it, and passed his hand slowly across his big, fair moustache.

"If he had not loved me, I should never have married him. I should have known by my own heart that he did not love me. But he did; and I loved him, and gave him my life—oh, how willingly, and it came to this. Day by day we drifted farther apart. If I had not loved him, it would have made no difference; but, because of love, I could not bear it, and I left his home. I told him that from henceforth our lives should run as apart as if we had never known each other; that if I met him I would neither speak to him, nor even show by look or sign that I had ever known him. I gave up even his name! And," she added, breaking into soft crying, "my husband is here! And I know now why the winter has been so long and cold; why the stillness and whiteness of the snow have almost killed me—because love is not dead, but has been lying starving in my heart, and the pain of it has been more than I could bear."

Neither noticed how, among the dark shadows at the farther end of the room, one drew back, through the half-open door, into the hall outside.

The voices and laughter from the kitchen, at the other side, grew merrier. It struck Olaf as being strange that any one could laugh and jest. Then he turned to her.

"Good-bye—Mrs. Aylmer," he said, gently, hesitating slightly before the name, "and may Heaven bless you, and give love back again into your life."

Then he, too, turned from the firelight into the shadows, and passed from the room.

CHAPTER III.

THE next morning Mrs. Aylmer's maid told her mistress that Mr. Ericsson had gone. He had left the station at day-break. Mrs. Aylmer had her breakfast in her room. When she came down she was ready dressed for a walk, and she went straight out of the house. It was a glorious morning; the sun bright and warm. The air was full of the sights and sounds of spring. She took a road that led her across the valley to the hills beyond. A broad road went winding upward between birch and pine. Every blade of grass, every tuft of vivid-coloured moss, every glint of pale, tender green was instinct with new-born life. Only love was dead! She thought of Olaf, and was full of pity and remorse. But she thought, too, of her husband; and when she thought of him, Olaf was forgotten. He had been dangerously ill; had been close to death, they said. And she had left him to be nursed by strangers—she, his wife. But he had not loved her. Others could do for him what should have been her dearest privilege. He was as well satisfied.

With hard and bitter rebellion in her heart, she walked on till she came to the wooden bridge that spanned a mountain torrent which tumbled, a little lower, into a broad stretch of water fringed with pine.

She stood on the bridge, looking into the seething, foaming, eddying waters below. She was roused by hearing a step. She turned sharply, and saw her husband. His face was very pale, and there was something in it she had never seen before. She could not move nor speak.

"Come back to me, May," he said, un-

steadily, "I cannot live without you. I have been blind—mad! I did not understand. But this year, without you, has taught me what love is. Forgive me, and come back to teach me what life should be. Last night I was full of bitterness. I meant to go away this morning." A dull flush reflected the blush that flamed into her face. "Believe me, I did not doubt you," he exclaimed, hoarsely. "Last night I knew, as I know to-day, as I knew the first hour I ever met you, that you were the truest woman on earth. But I was mad. Life had become intolerable without you. And then meeting you so suddenly, so unexpectedly, and seeing you so proud and indifferent to me, so gentle to him, I lost my reason. I sent that message through him, though I really never——"

She flung out her hand, as if even the explanation would have humbled them past recall. He coloured red again, but his eyes looked straight into hers.

"I have something else to say. Last night, after I was able to think, I left my room to look for you. I wanted to tell you myself, before he could give the message, that I should go away to-day—that you need not fear that I should pain you a moment longer than I could help, with my presence in the house. I meant to ask you to forgive me before we parted once more, and then I should have gone away and never tried to see you again. But—when I came to the room I found you talking to him. I heard what you said. May! May! Cannot this springtime be a new beginning for us too? I love you! My life is a poor, maimed thing without you. Come back to me and complete it, and never more shall you have to doubt. My love has never failed you; it was only my mad folly——"

"It was all my mistake, Paul!" she said, the tears raining down her face. "Can you forgive me?"

The waterfall thundered on, down the rocky gorge. The scent of rising sap and aromatic resin perfumed the air. All round, above, below, was the stir of new-kindling life. When these two, standing hand-in-hand in the midst of it all, should long have passed on to the end, and have been forgotten, these things would continue, as if their little human life story had never come near them this bright spring morning. But what did that matter to them? Love was eternal, and its glory was shining even now into their newly sanctified lives.

AN ANGEL IN RED.

By H. F. ABELL.

CHAPTER I.

FROM a human point of view there were very few attributes of the ideal Arcadian season in the April of 1815. Nature had worked loyally up to old tradition, and even the ugly part of East Anglia, where our story opens, looked attractive under her care, for the birds were arriving fast from their winter quarters, the voice of the cuckoo was frequent, lilacs were budding, orchards were beginning to bloom, and gardens were gay with primroses, violets, hyacinths, and lilies-of-the-valley.

But man refused to obey the summons to rejoice, to be at peace, and to be glad. Every village inn was a political club; Squire and yeoman, farmer and tradesman, ploughboy and 'prentice lad had but one topic of conversation—the last movement of the "Corsican Ogre," and the chance of Britain being dragged into another war. Fair lips were fluent with words and phrases which were usually associated with mess-rooms and barrack-yards; the parson's lady and the village granddame found more stirring food for talk than the linen-press and the jam cupboard; and the very urchins in the street played at French and English.

Cuton village, a couple of miles from Elmford market-town, caught the infection, mildly, perhaps, from a comparative point of view, but badly enough to render it as unlike the quiet, sleepy little hamlet of ordinary times as could be.

The girls hated it all, and with reason; for if their sweethearts did not desert them for the recruiting sergeant, their time was fully occupied with talking, and arguing, and drinking toasts. And none hated it all more than did Mehitable Buttrick, daughter of the head-keeper at Cuton Hall, and betrothed to young Abner Harrington.

Mehitable was not a beauty. She was a strong, sturdy girl of twenty, with a round, good-humoured face, much freckled by wind and sun; a pair of red arms; and a foot, beneath which daisies and buttercups crouched never to rise again. But she was a kind and tender-hearted lass, and out of that great, ruddy-lipped mouth came the softest and sweetest of voices, which had never uttered a harsh or hasty word.

During this latter part of the month of

April, Abner Harrington had treated her as the other youths treated their lasses. He rarely saw her, was always in a hurry, and, worst of all, he was a great deal too often flushed of face and thick of speech.

Mehitable took it sadly to heart, and moped and sighed about in a manner very unusual with one whose very name was synonymous, in the local mouth, with untiring energy and ceaseless activity.

One morning she met Abner—a good-looking, strapping young saddler of three-and-twenty. He was in the neighbourhood of the "Red Lion," and although he was far from being absolutely drunk, he had evidently taken more than young fellows usually do before eleven o'clock in the morning.

He stopped her.

"Heard the news, 'Hitable?' he said at once, without any greeting, "the King of France has fled to Lille. Boney is in Paris, and in the Royal Palace, and the grand folk in Vienna have pronounced Boney an outlaw; and the Duke of Wellington has been in council at the War Office, and there's going to be a rare to-do."

"Oh, Abner, Abner, how I wish you cared nothing about all this," said the girl; "I take it wonderful sadly, I do. What do it matter to you what Boney and all them others are about? You ain't a soldier, and you ain't a boy. You're a saddler, and you're betrothed to me."

"Nonsense, 'Hitable,'" said the young fellow, with a laugh. "If an Englishman doesn't take an interest in these matters, which are occupying the attention of the senates of the world, he is not worthy the name of Englishman."

Mehitable stared at the fluent production of such phrases by one who spoke usually the plainest East Anglian Doric; but she knew that clap-trap orators abounded at the bars of village inns, and that many a young fellow owed his first step to ruin to the seduction of their vapid sophisms.

"And, Abner, it makes you associate with men you know nothing of, and it leads you to drink——"

Here poor Mehitable was lacking in womanly tact—or rather, be it said, in the knowledge of men—or she would have guessed that the very worst way to gain her end was to hint to a man who was getting drunk that he was drunk.

"You mean to say I'm drunk!" exclaimed Abner. "Then I'm not fit to be talking to you; much less to be your

sweetheart. Mind your own business, and I'll mind mine."

And he swaggered off, leaving the girl looking after him with eyes which betrayed by their tears the terrible blow dealt at her heart.

A week passed. During this time war had been declared against France, and the Duke of Wellington was assembling a British army to lead into Belgium. The first battalion of the East Anglian Regiment had passed through Cuton village, and was now at Elmford, on its way to the coast, recruiting. Cuton was like a deserted village; the shops were shut—for the apprentices would not work—the farmyards were silent, the fields were abandoned to the crows. All the young fellows were at Elmford, gaping at the red-coats, listening to the martial music; and, worst of all, every evening fewer lads returned to their homes in Cuton village.

Still, Abner Harrington came home, and Mehitable was easy in her mind. He was a high-spirited, impulsive, and easily-led-away young fellow; but he was betrothed to her, and Mehitable valued him too highly to believe that there was anything serious in the cruel words he had spoken to her.

On the twentieth of May the battalion was to march from Elmford. Its numbers were by no means complete, and the recruiting officers were employing every means to get young fellows to join the colours.

On the night of the nineteenth Elmford presented an appearance it had probably never presented before during the long centuries of its uneventful existence. Usually by nine o'clock the streets were empty, dark, and silent; but on this night Elmford, to borrow the expression used by old Paddle, who drove the last up-coach, "was a-most like Lunnon itself." Soldiers were everywhere: rolling about the streets to the strains of popular choruses, gathered about the doors of the three principal inns, crowding the tap-rooms of the ale-houses, laughing, shouting, singing, and cheering. The shops were open, the private houses illuminated, and to the mass of townspeople who were abroad, were added swarms of visitors from all the villages around.

All that day Mehitable Buttrick had been miserable. She had not even seen Abner for two days. She walked into Elmford, her heart full of dread; but to look for one young man in that swarming hive of excited humanity was to look

for the proverbial needle in a bottle of hay. She returned, unable to settle to any work; putting her hand to a job and laying it down the next minute; continually in and out of the cottage, and alert to the sound of every footstep. Her father and mother endeavoured to reassure her, but she refused to be comforted, and long after they had gone to bed, sat at the window which commanded a view of the moonlit village street, so that Abner, who had to pass the cottage on his way home, might not escape her notice.

At midnight, by which hour the pickets had managed to clear the streets of Elmford with fair success, a young fellow, in a bright, new uniform, was seated on the respectable steps of one of the most respectable private residences. He was very drunk; his shako was lying on the pavement, and his head was bent over his doubled-up knees.

To him came the picket. They aroused him after the usual gentle fashion of pickets, and tried to extract from him the street and house where he was billeted. He could tell them nothing.

"Where shall we shove him, sergeant?" asked one of the men.

"Anywhere—there into that out-house," was the reply.

"Look here, young chap," roared the sergeant in the ear of the young man, who had been partially brought to his senses by the tumble on to the straw, "the revalley goes at four to-morrow morning. There's your musket and your traps. You've got four hours to sleep off your drunk, and mind, if you don't answer your name at roll-call, you'll be put in the gaol as a deserter. If you don't believe, read that there notice."

And he directed Abner's glazed eyes to a bill affixed to the wall, headed G.R. on either side of a big crown, and threatening dire penalties to all who, having taken G.R.'s shillings, should get away without giving G.R. an equivalent for them.

Then his coat, trousers, and boots were taken off, and he was left. At four o'clock the next morning Elmford was roused from its brief slumbers by the rattle of a dozen drums in the market-place. At five o'clock the roll was called. At six the men were dismissed to breakfast, and at seven, under a clear blue sky and a smiling sun, the battalion marched out of the town, colours flying, band playing, to the accompaniment of cheers, and God-speeds, and cries, and

sobblings from the vast crowd which marched along with it until it was well on the London road.

At ten o'clock Abner Harrington awoke. He sat up and looked around him with the air of a man just returned from a long visit in a far country, pressed his hands to his aching head, and tried to collect his wits.

"Why, hang it! There's something wrong. I'll swear I was a soldier yesterday. I had a red coat, and a tall leather hat, and a gun, and a knapsack, and—why, what can have happened?"

He stood up and looked round the shed. He must either have been dreaming, he thought, or very drunk, for in the place of his military outfit there were his own clothes.

There was a pump outside. He gave himself a good sluicing and felt a trifle better, although his head seemed as if it did not belong to him. Then he dressed himself and went out. The first thing which attracted his notice was G.R.'s proclamation. He read it through more than once, and at the end came to the conclusion that nothing but keeping himself studiously out of sight could prevent him from being arrested and punished as a deserter.

He peeped into the market-place. All was quiet and sunny; and but for the presence of the workhouse men sweeping away the refuse of the last week's excitement, it would have been hard to realise that this scene of Boeotian calm and stillness had ever been otherwise.

"Well," he said to himself, "as I'm a deserter I'd best not be seen. Poor 'Hitable! How glad she will be to see me! and how I will repay her for having behaved myself like a brute!"

He slunk out of Elmford by back-streets and by-lanes, until he reached the main road a mile out of the town. Half an hour's further walking brought him into Cuton. Some young fellows were talking in a group outside the "Red Lion," and, before he could get out of the way, had observed him.

"Why, Abner, man!" said one, "we thought as how you'd gone and 'listed. Leastways, Jack Wright says he saw you in the King's livery a-marchin' along like the Dook hisself."

"Yes, and poor Mehitable Buttrick went well-nigh distracted," said a second. "She's been asking about you, and crying, and going on ter'ble to see. Come in, man, and have a mug."

But Abner had ale enough in his head

already to last him for some time, and, with an excuse, he proceeded on to the Buttricks' cottage.

Mrs. Buttrick met him at the door. She possessed Mehitable's physique without the girl's tenderness of character, and her face warned the penitent that a storm was in readiness for him.

"Shame on you, Abner Harrington!" said Mrs. Buttrick, "shame on you for a murderer!"

"A murderer!" exclaimed Abner.

"Yes, a cowardly murderer!" repeated Mrs. Buttrick. "You've driven away our 'Hitable, with them harum-scarum tricks of yourn. When she heard you'd 'listed she went away, and nobody hasn't set eyes on her since; and Heaven above only sees where she is."

Abner stood shame-stricken, and heard in silence the torrent of abuse showered on him by Mrs. Buttrick, until, the poor woman sank down on the seat in the porch and sobbed bitterly. He did not attempt to console her, for, in truth, his thoughts were with Mehitable; and, if ever man stood self-convicted of unmanly, dishonourable conduct, it was Abner Harrington.

He walked away rapidly. All that morning, all that afternoon, he sought Mehitable. The penalties for desertion had no fears for him now, and he walked boldly into Elmford. Every one in Elmford knew Mehitable Buttrick. No one had seen her since the previous morning, when she had come in and enquired for Abner.

All sorts of terrible thoughts crossed the mind of the unhappy young man. He had heard and read of disappointed girls making away with themselves. But Mehitable, much as she loved him, sensitive and tender as was her heart, was not the sort of girl to kill herself because her lover had chosen to serve his King and country.

Then the old fear took possession of him, and he crept out of the market-place branded, not only as a deserter, but as a murderer.

He wandered away down to the river-side—that river-side linked in his memory with so many recollections of quiet Sunday walks and evening talks with Mehitable.

There was a group of boys and men gathered round something by the old bridge. He approached with a heart full of sickening fears, and almost expected to see poor Mehitable's still, dead figure

stretched on the long grass. The group was so absorbed that it did not notice his approach. He peered over the shoulder of a man and saw, not poor, dead Mehitable herself, but her clothes: the brown stuff dress, the print apron, the coarse straw-hat—every thing.

With the finger of detection pointed at him in every twig which shot across his path, with the word "murderer" ringing in each joyous bird-trill, he sped away—whither he knew not; but until the evening was far advanced he wandered over the flat stretch of meadow, until, utterly exhausted in mind and body, he crept homewards, and unseen, unheard, shut himself up in his room. There was no fear of interruption, for his father was in Colchester on business, and his mother had grown so accustomed to her son's absences that she now took no note of his out-goings or in-comings.

All the next day he remained there, eating nothing, nor sleeping—simply lying on his bed with dead Mehitable's reproachful face ever before him. Early the next morning he was aroused by the distant crash of martial music. He sprang up from the bed, threw open the window, and looked out. Above a cloud of dust he could see the glint of sunshine on steel. Louder and louder grew the music, and the tramp of feet, and nearer came the soldiers.

Then a sudden idea struck him. What was life to him now? The noose of the executioner seemed to dangle over his head already, and any death was welcome to him but that! He hastily huddled on his clothes, went out into the fresh, sweet-scented air, and crept rapidly along by the river path and the fields into Elmford.

When the second battalion of the East Anglian Regiment marched out of Elmford town a week later, there went with it amongst the many recruits in its ranks Abner Harrington, of Cuton.

CHAPTER II.

AT six o'clock in the evening of the eighteenth of June, 1815, the two battalions of the East Anglian Regiment formed one of the thirteen squares, which for three hours had been rolling back and destroying the cuirassiers of Milhaud on the Plateau of Mont Saint Jean. Squares, did we say? Rather, shreds of squares. During these long Sabbath hours, these fresh-faced young heroes had more than kept at bay

the finest cavalry in the world; and still, at six o'clock, shattered and torn, with three-quarters of their officers killed, with flags hanging in shreds, faint with fatigue and thirst, running short of cartridges, they were defiant.

Abner Harrington was there. Of what he had gone through during these hours he had but a confused idea; but he knew that he who had never killed a living creature wilfully in his life had struck, and thrust, and parried; had cheered with delirious joy as some colossal horseman reared in his saddle and fell head downwards, shot through the head, or pierced by bayonet thrust; had laughed in death's face, and had been in the midst of the sickening slaughter, and maiming and wounding, without one single impulse to turn away. Not a man who had stood near him when the battle opened was by him now; his face was begrimed with powder and dust, his white epaulets, his cross-belts, and his hands were stained with blood; his shako had been slashed away, there was a stinging sensation in one shoulder, and a long, bloody rent in one leg.

He had caught the terrible infection of war; the ceaseless commands, "Close up the ranks!" or "Open the ranks!" or "Step up there!" were as music in his ears; and no power on earth but death would have moved him from his position behind that ghastly barricade of dead men.

Suddenly a great wall of horses and steel-clad men rose up before him out of the smoke-drifts; there was a sharp, bright, straight flash in the air; a red body seemed to cut across the flash for a moment, a deluge of warm blood spurted over him, and he knew no more.

When he came to himself again he was sensible of chilliness, and of a rough, jolting movement.

"Where am I?" he murmured.

"Going to Brussels in a cart," was the reply of his neighbour.

"What's been going on?" he asked.

"Going on! Whoi, we've whopped Boney properly, that's what's been going on," was the answer.

Abner tried to raise himself, but a pang of fearful pain extorted a cry from his lips, and he swooned off again.

All through that terrible night he jolted on. Early in the morning he recovered consciousness again. They had left the forest behind them, and were passing through open country dotted with houses.

Presently they rattled under an imposing gateway, and by the broad streets and the crowds of people, Abner knew it was Brussels. He raised himself with a painful effort, and saw that the cart in which he was, contained a dozen other poor fellows from every regiment engaged, all in various stages of suffering, and that before and behind, as far as the eye could reach, stretched a line of carts similarly laden.

Presently they halted in front of a church, and were lifted out, and Abner Harrington found himself, for the first time, in that terrible world, a military hospital in wartime. It was very dark, so dark that, although it was midday, the lamps were lit, and Abner could only make out multi-coloured heaps strewn about the floor in all directions; amongst which moved men with their shirt-sleeves rolled up, the dark, weird forms of sisters of mercy, and red-coated soldiers, whilst the sickening smell, and the chorus of agony which rolled from end to end of the building, the cries of delirium, the entreaties for water, completed a scene which made a far deeper impression on him than had the battle itself.

His mattress was in one of the darkest corners of the dark church, in an alcove, behind the high altar. Here he lay for some hours, awaiting his turn with the surgeons.

The wound which had incapacitated him was a bad one, for the edge of a sabre had cut clean through his shoulder to the collar-bone. "And," remarked the surgeon, "if that brave comrade of yours hadn't taken the worst part of the blow to himself, you would have been still lying on Mont Saint Jean."

For a fortnight Abner remained in the church of the Augustines. During all this time he was waited on by one of the convalescent soldiers who helped the staff of regular nurses in their overwhelming task—a man who had lost his right arm and the lower part of whose face was hidden in bandages.

Never had sufferer more gentle or more patient nurse, or one who, deprived of the power of speech, could more readily interpret signs, and anticipate wants. He had, however, half-a-dozen other sufferers to attend to, each of whom seemed to regard him, as did Abner, with genuine affection; and Abner, who was longing to seize the first opportunity of opening his heart to some one, could not see enough of him. By fits and starts, however, he did

manage to pour out his trouble and tell the story of his life, and often during the course of the narration felt a sympathetic pressure of the hand laid on his, which spoke all that the sealed lips of the listener would have said.

Still, with even the light of this kind nurse breaking through the gloom, it was a terrible fortnight. Happily Abner's position behind the high altar hid from him the heartrending scenes which were hourly being enacted in the body of the church; but he could hear the cries and groans, and he even learned the meaning of a certain measured tramp of heavy feet along the stone floor, for they had more than once visited his neighbourhood, and each time they had borne away a rigid, silent figure wrapped up in a military cloak.

The hospital accommodation was utterly inadequate to the enormous demands made on it, so that patients were discharged as soon as it was possible to remove them without risk, and their places were immediately filled up. The cartloads of wounded, who had come into Brussels with Abner, represented but a fraction of those who had been torn and maimed in the battle; and every day exploring parties brought in men who had wandered away to the woods, or to farms and cottages, whilst the number of those who were yet undiscovered could never be estimated.

So Abner received his discharge long before he felt that he could move without help. His last duty before leaving was to bid his kindly nurse good-bye, and to thank him.

"I can never forget your kindness," said the young man, "and I don't deserve any, for I have told you the story of my life. But I have been spared through all this danger, and I have learned to know that bad as I was before, I was still worse when I sought death. I daren't return home; but I'm main sure that I shall find myself there some time or other, if it only be to find out if my poor Mehitable was ever discovered, and to see where they've laid her."

Then he pressed the nurse's hand, and limped out.

For six weeks longer he remained in the convalescent hospital established in a Benedictine Monastery, situated in the outskirts of the city. Perfect rest and kind treatment at the hands of the brothers, restored him sufficiently to health to be able to leave Brussels with his battalion for Amiens, where it was to be quartered

during the occupation of France by the allied armies.

He paid a last visit to the Augustines' Church before leaving, in order to see his soldier nurse once again, but was told that he had left for England with his battalion.

Almost exactly on the anniversary of the day when Abner Harrington had parted from Mehitable Buttrick with an angry speech on his lips, the London "Royal Blue" coach set him down at the door of the "Black Boy" in Elmford. He passed along the front of the inn to a back-lane unrecognised, and proceeded to the river.

He paused for a few moments by the bridge where Mehitable's clothes had been found, and then pushed on with slow, uncertain steps, towards Cuton. Only a year had passed since he had last trod this path, yet so much had happened during that brief span, that he seemed surprised to find his surroundings so little altered.

It was Saturday, and Abner could already see the boys flocking off to the cricket-field by Summerfield Church, and more than one pair of lovers strolling over the distant fields.

With something of the old dread over him, he wanted to avoid meeting any one, and so turned off into the woodland, away from the towing-path. About the copses and thickets, under the fresh, bright lattice-work of young leaves, he wandered until the sun set amidst a royal profusion of many-tinted clouds, which gradually drifted away, and left a pure, unbroken expanse of blue, dotted here and there with an early star.

Then he quitted the woodland shades and retraced his steps towards the river, and pursued his way more boldly in the direction of Cuton. He would make himself known as little as possible, for he simply wanted to hear about poor Mehitable, and then he would turn his back on his native village for ever.

It was dark when he reached the first houses in Cuton village; but there was the usual Saturday night assembly at the door of the "Red Lion," and in it there would certainly be some who would at once recognise him, altered in appearance as he was after his year's absence.

So, feeling very much as he felt on the night of his discovery that Mehitable had disappeared, he crept along on the opposite side of the street under the shadow of the cottage eaves, and only breathed freely

when he arrived within sight of John Buttrick's cottage.

Strange, he thought, that a man who had faced Napoleon's cavalry and the dangers and horrors of a military hospital, should be afraid to face the companions of his boyhood, the inhabitants of an obscure little English village.

There was a carriage and pair at the keeper's lodge gate—a most unusual occurrence—a reason for which Abner was at a loss to find. He waited until he saw a tall man in a long cloak, accompanied by a lady, enter it and drive away; then he crossed the road on tiptoe, pushed open the little wicket-gate, crossed the patch of garden, and peered in through the window.

There!—seated in the big arm-chair at the table, just as he had seen her a hundred times, was *Mehitable Buttrick*! She was closely wrapped in a woollen shawl, and was examining closely something in a case: a portrait, a brooch, or something.

He drew back, trembling all over. The joy was so great that it had almost stunned him. Had he been dreaming? Had he really ever left Cuton and gone for a soldier with the brand of Cain searing his forehead?

It was some time before he could collect himself sufficiently to make a move towards the door, open it, and announce himself. He crept away to the porch seat, and tried to grasp the infinity of his happiness. *Mehitable* would probably spurn him and refuse to speak to him; but she was alive, and he was cleared of one foul crime. Perhaps she had given her heart to some one else; for, plain-looking as she was, her sterling qualities marked her out as an excellent help-mate in life to many a young fellow in the neighbourhood. At any rate, he could ask her forgiveness, tell her what he had gone through, and how he had tried to wipe off some of the stain on his name by serving his country.

So he opened the door. *Mehitable* hastily put out of sight the object at which she had been looking, and said:

"Why, Abner, I am glad to see you!"

"Are you really," gasped the young man, "are you really glad to see me after all that I have done? Oh, *'Hitable*, it's a new life to me. I thought as how you was dead, that you'd drowned yourself acause of me. I didn't expect it, and I don't deserve it; but I be so thankful."

She was standing gazing at him, a smile of real pleasure on her face, which seemed to have grown broader, more good-hu-

moured, and more freckled than ever during the past year. Still she was there in the sturdy flesh, and that was all he cared. Even if she were to tell him with her next breath that she had transferred her affections, or that she could never forgive him, he could have borne it, so great was his joy at seeing her alive.

Here John Buttrick, her father, came in. He greeted Abner with a tremendous grip of the hand, and a hearty, "Glad to see ye again, Muster Abner." Then Mrs. Buttrick came in, and she, too, smiled and welcomed him. But none of them showed any amazement at his arrival, and he noted it, thinking that evidently no one in Cuton knew even that he had enlisted.

"You look wonnerful sadly, Muster Abner," said the keeper.

"I wonder I'm here at all," said Abner. "I've been at death's door a score of times."

"Oh!" was the only reply to this.

"Really now, have ye? What ye been arter? Sodgering?"

Abner nodded. This was not the hero-worship which he had been accustomed to see bestowed on returned soldiers. He could not understand it, and still less when he thought he saw the keeper evidently trying to suppress a laugh.

"D'ye hear that, *'Hitable*? Muster Abner's been a-sodgering," said the keeper, nudging his daughter.

"Well, *'Hitable*, and now tell me about yourself," said Abner, feeling just a little annoyed, although without reason, as he knew. "You seem to fare good tidily."

"No, I want to hear about you," said the girl.

So Abner related all that had happened from the moment he enlisted for the first time, until he arrived at the hospital in Brussels.

Here he paused. During his narration he had kept his eyes riveted on *Mehitable*, and he noticed that not only did she keep on the woollen shawl, although the night was warm, but that she used only her left hand.

"*'Hitable*," he said, "what is the matter with your right hand?"

"I've—I've lost the use of it," stammered the girl, "from an accident. Please go on. You got to the hospital—yes?"

The keeper was shaking with suppressed laughter. There was even a bright light in Mrs. Buttrick's eyes. Abner could not for the life of him make it out, for assuredly never was story more devoid of a comic element than that which he had been telling.

So he rose, and quietly lifted the shawl off Mehitable's shoulders.

The right arm was gone from the shoulder.

"Mehitable!" cried Abner, "what does this mean? How did you have this done? Wur I the cause of it?"

"You wur! You wur!" roared the keeper, unable any longer to suppress his feelings. "If it hadn't been for you, her arm would have been as fast as yourn!"

Abner looked at him, then at Mrs. Buttrick, then at Mehitable.

"It ain't of no use," continued the keeper. "I'm a real bad 'un to keep a secret, I am; but——"

"Stop, father—stop!" said the girl. "Let me tell it. Abner, do you mind the night the sodgers went away—the first lot, I mean—you got drunk, very drunk?"

"Yes, I do. Well?"

"Well, I had been looking for you fur two days, fur I had an idea you'd gone and 'listed; and I was giving it up as a bad job, when all of a sudden I seed you lying down in Simpson's out-house. I'd read the notices all about deserting. I knew you couldn't be up in time to answer your name, and that they'd find you. Well, so I took your things, and I answered your name, after I'd put my own duds away under the bridge."

"You went for a sodger, and you was at Waterloo!" exclaimed Abner, in utter amazement.

"Yes she wur! that she wur!" exclaimed the keeper, in a voice of triumph. "And where's that thing the Colonel brought ye just now?"

"Never mind that, father," said the girl. "Yes, I was at Waterloo, Abner, and I lost my arm there; and I was in the church——"

Abner sprang to his feet.

"And you were that kind, good nurse, who couldn't speak!" he cried. "Oh, 'Hitable! 'Hitable! why didn't you tell me?"

"But she ain't told you the best part, Muster Abner," said the keeper. "She wouldn't ha' told us, but the Colonel, who's

staying up at the Hall, he told us how she'd saved your life, and lost her arm in doing of it; and this very evening he browt her a silver medal bigger than a crown piece."

This was too much for Abner. He dropped his head on his arms and cried bitterly. Mehitable raised his face to hers, and said:

"Abner, I did my duty, that was all."

"No, 'Hitable, it warn't your duty to do all this for a worthless vagabone like me," said the young man. "But how did you get on with the fighting?"

"I didn't fight, Abner," replied the girl. "They saw I knew nothing about muskets or drill, so they told me off to help the surgeons."

"Yes, and you should hear what the Colonel has to say about her," said John Buttrick; "that she didn't care no more for bullets, and swords, and them things than I does for flies."

"But I've always loved you, dear," said Abner. "And when I came into the village and no one could tell where you were, and I saw your clothes lying under Elmford Bridge, I said I'd just go and look for death, as I made sure I'd as good as murdered you. And may I love you still, 'Hitable?"

"Yes, Abner. I am happy now," answered the girl.

So, in a few weeks Abner Harrington and Mehitable Buttrick were married at Cuton Church, and the Colonel of the regiment not only attended the ceremony in full uniform, but made the bridal pair a handsome present, on the condition that both should wear their medals in the church. They did; and old Oly Turner, who died the other day at Cuton, used often to describe the unique ceremony of marriage between young Abner Harrington and the girl he loved, who had but one arm and wore the Waterloo medal on her wedding-dress, adding that he "minded it wur a rainy April mornin', but as the weddin' party came out of John Buttrick's cottage the sun came out and stopped out all day."

The Right of Translating any of the Articles contained in this Number is reserved by the Authors.

NOTICE.

THE NEW SERIES OF "ALL THE YEAR ROUND."

CONDUCTED BY CHARLES DICKENS.

The Monthly Parts, 1 and 2, also the Weekly Numbers from the commencement, may be ordered at all Booksellers', Newsvendors', or at the Railway Bookstalls.

Office: 26, WELLINGTON STREET, STRAND W.C.



NEW
GREEN



Sold by

B

THE
Enam
Stiff
Lace

Sold

6d.
6d.
6d.
1d.

Flee

Post Fr
So

Post Fr

Post Fr

T. J. AL

GOLD MEDAL,

PARIS, 1878.



JOSEPH GILLOTT'S CELEBRATED STEEL PENS.

SOLD BY ALL DEALERS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

Every Packet bears the *fac-simile*
Signature,

J. A. Gillott

NEWEST INVENTION—
GREATEST NOVELTY.



"They fit perfectly, and are far superior to all the other Corsets I have tried."—(Signed) MARIE ROZE.

The **Y&N** Patent

DIAGONAL SEAM CORSET

Patented in England and on the Continent. Will not split in the seams nor tear in the fabric.

Exquisite model. Perfect comfort. Guaranteed wear.

Beware of worthless imitations.

Every genuine Y & N Corset is stamped,

"Y & N Patent Diagonal

Seam Corset, No. 116," in oval.

Gold Medal, New Zealand Exhibition, 1882.

Gold Medal, HIGHEST AWARD for Corsets, London International Exhibition, 1884.

LATEST AWARD!!! Gold Medal, International Exhibition, Edinburgh, 1886.

Sold by all Drapers & Ladies' Outfitters in United Kingdom & Colonies

JEWSBURY & BROWN'S

ORIGINAL & ONLY GENUINE

Oriental

CLIMATE **Tooth** SIXTY YEARS IN USE.
PROOF.

CAUTION.
THE GENUINE ONLY
IS SIGNED
JEWSBURY & BROWN. Paste

All Perfumers and Chemists. 1/6 & 2/6 Pots.

BORAX STARCH GLAZE

The Queen's Royal Glaze for Imparting Enamel Gloss to Starch, giving permanent Stiffness, Brilliancy, and Beauty to Muslin, Lace, Linen, Cuffs, Collars, Fronts, etc.

Packets, 1d. and 3d. Boxes, 6d. each.

Sold by all GROCERS, SOAP & STARCH DEALERS.

Patent Borax Company, Sole Makers, Works, **BIRMINGHAM.**



Trade Mark Registered.

POST FREE.

- 6d. "Before I Began to Speak." By a BABY.
- 6d. "Heart or Brain."
- 6d. "How to Become Witty."
- 1d. "How to Choose a Member for Parliament."

Fleet Printing Works, 14, Whitefriars St.

VIDE REVIEWS.

POST FREE, 1s., Cloth, 2s. "The Beauties of Festus." Selections from P. J. BAILEY's celebrated Poem.

Longmans & Co., London.

POST FREE, 2s., Boards; Cloth, 3s. 6d. "The World of Thought." A Novel.

Simphin, Marshall, & Co., London.

POST FREE, 4d. "How to Form the Habit of Paying Attention."

T. J. Allman & Son, 67, New Oxford Street, W.

5 GOLD MEDALS

BORWICK'S BAKING POWDER

FOR CAKES, PASTRY
PUDDINGS AND
WHOLESOME BREAD

THE
BEST
THAT
MONEY
CAN
BUY.

Gold Medals: Edinburgh and Liverpool Exhibitions, 1886.

Fry's



**PURE
CONCENTRATED
SOLUBLE**

Cocoa

PREPARED BY A NEW AND SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC PROCESS.

Sir CHARLES A. CAMERON, M.D.—“I have never tasted Cocoa that I like so well. It is especially adapted to those whose digestive organs are weak, and I strongly recommend it as a substitute for tea for young persons.”

W. H. R. STANLEY, M.D.—“I consider it a very rich, delicious Cocoa. It is highly concentrated, and therefore economical as a family food. It is the drink *par excellence* for children, and gives no trouble in making.”

To secure this article ask for “Fry's Pure Concentrated Cocoa.”

38 PRIZE MEDALS AWARDED TO J. S. FRY & SONS, BRISTOL, LONDON, and SYDNEY.

26, Wellington Street, Strand, London, W.C.

New Series of “All the Year Round.”

So many Volumes are now comprised in the Second Series of ALL THE YEAR ROUND, that we have deemed it expedient, for the convenience of its readers, to commence with January, 1887, a New Series of the Journal.

It will be my earnest endeavour to ensure for the New Series the favour with which its predecessors have been received, and for which I take this opportunity of expressing my grateful thanks; and I trust that I may be enabled to maintain, in the future, the high standard of literary merit for which ALL THE YEAR ROUND has been always distinguished in the past. CHARLES DICKENS.

FOR SALADS,

USE

Crosse & Blackwell's

MALT VINEGAR AND LUCCA OIL,

GUARANTEED PURE AND UNADULTERATED.

The Bottles bear the names of CROSSE & BLACKWELL on the labels.